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PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

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17 soldiers killed in Sulu

AFP says 30 of Nur's followers slain

ZAMBOANGA CITY—The Armed Forces ordered the bombardment of rebel positions on Jolo yesterday after 17 soldiers were killed in intensified fighting with Moro guerrillas over two days.

Up to 30 gunmen loyal to Moro Moro National Liberation Front leader Nur Misuari may have also been killed in the clashes in Patikkul and outlying towns, Southern Command chief Lt. Gen. Alberto Braganza said.

Local officials said as many as 40 soldiers may have died in gun battles since Monday.

"They have asked for it and we'll give it to them," Braganza said as he deployed hundreds of Marines and ordered Air Force planes to blast the gunmen holed up in Patikkul.

"I have ordered an strikes to permit close engagement," he said. "We are pursuing less than 600 armed men that are holding out in the mountains."

Braganza said Misuari's MNLF followers had merged with about 400 members of the Abu Sayyaf.

Misuari formerly headed the MNLF, which accepted limited autonomy and signed a peace deal with the government in 1996.

But violence flared again in 2001 and Misuari was implicated on charges of rebellion, which carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

Many of Misuari's armed followers still maintain strongholds in Jolo and have been accused of supporting the Abu Sayyaf.

The Abu Sayyaf was best known for kidnapping foreigners and Filipinos for ransom until it allegedly killed at least 100 peo-

(TODAY/WORLD/A10)

KUNG HEI FAT CHOY: A vessel vases of the Chinese lunar New Year, the Year of the Wooden Rooster in Taipei. (Top) Rooster's in cages are displayed in Harbor City on the waterfront of Hong Kong. (AFP/REUTERS)

Catholic Chinoys can still toast the New Year

By Blanche S. Rivera

NOW CNN Chinese-Filipino Catholics live it up is being left Wednesday today, and their faith urges them to ponder on their mortality? But they want to paint the town red. And they want to hear on all the delicacies of the Year Boy of the Year of the Rooster.

It can be done. "How" (the celebrations you asked and where

(TODAY/LIFE/A20)

HAUNTED: Inmates of Mary mosquito ship in Zamboanga City bound for Jolo as reinforcements, who have been in battle for the past two days with the loyalists of Jailed Moro rebel leader Nur Misuari. The government sweeps in that territory militants have stepped up attacks to try to sabotage the peace talks.

Let's impeach GMA, Pimentel tells Philconsa

By Michael Lim Ubac

FOR ALLEGEDLY violating the Constitution and betraying the public trust in three months, President Macapagal-Arroyo should be impeached, Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Q. Pimentel Jr. said last night.

In a speech before the Philippine Constitution Association (Philconsa), Pimentel said Mrs Arroyo committed the following:

+ Illegal use of the Comelec funds seized through the road users tax and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (Owwa) for

(TODAY/NEWS/A1)

So, is Marcos money intact?

SO PEREZ'S the Marcos loot?

Assistants party-list Rep. Rafael Mariano over the question he challenged President Macapagal-Arroyo to show proof that the $683 million in recovered assets of late dictator Ferdinand Marcos were still intact.

"I've heard the same rhetorical question so. 'Is the ill-gotten wealth still intact? Where is it?'" Mariano asked.

In a statement, Mariano said the President was turning the victims of Marcos atrocities into treasure hunters "looking and waiting for luck."

He said part of the money might have been used for the campaign of Mr Arroyo in the 2004 presidential election.

"We will not stoop to—that kind of allegation," Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye said in response interview when asked to comment on Mariano's challenge.

Bunye dismissed Mariano's call, saying the President gave a commitment to use $100 million from the $683 million for the compensation of the victims of human rights violations during the Marcos regime.

The government cannot give the compensation until the Commission Agrarian Reform Law (CARL), which requires that all recovered ill-gotten Marcos

(TODAY/NEWS/A1)

Bongbong: Not me but gov't duty to pay victims

HONOLULU—The son of late dictator Ferdinand Marcos told a federal judge that it was the Philippine government's responsibility—and not his family's—to indemnify thousands of victims of martial law abuses.

Marcos Junior, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., who is on forced on a goodwill tour, attended a closed hearing Monday before US District Judge Manuel Real.

A US court ruling last week which upheld in effect a Philippine Supreme Court order forfeiting $683 million of Marcos assets to the government has stirred new controversy over how the Marcos victims could be indemnified.

Bongbong spoke publicly about the case only through his lawyer.

"My client supports the settlement and its prompt funding, but

(TODAY/NEWS/A1)

A PALE and haggard Joseph Estrada arrives by helicopter.

Erap back in hospital; pneumonia, says doc

By Armand N. Nocum

JOSEPH Estrada's knees are in tip-top shape, but he's back in the hospital again.

The physician, Antonio Herman, told the deposed ex-president yesterday afternoon that the ousted President had pneumonia. "It's not his legs. The operation was very successful," the doctor said of the knee replacement surgery that Estrada went through at the Hong Kong Adventist Hospital in December.

Estrada, 67, was airlifted from his rest home in Tanay, Rizal...enhance he is being held on plunder and perjury charges—to the Cardinal Santos Medical Center in San Juan before noon yesterday.

San Juan is considered Estrada turf. The homes of the ex-President, his partners and his sons,

(TODAY/NEWS/A1)

Do you need all these men, Mikey?

By Mikko Dizon

YOU'D think the fashion of excess had landed.

More than 20 members of the elite President's Security Group (PSG) were deployed on Monday to name Dangungo Rep. Jose Miguel "Mikey" Arroyo and his family at the Cen-

(TODAY/NEWS/A4)

A3
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2005

WEATHER FORECAST

Second **FRONTPAGE**

School rehab funds barely trickling in

By Dona Z. Pazzibugan

THE FUND-RAISING drive for the more than 1,200 public schools destroyed by the deadly typhoons that hit Luzon late last year is in danger of falling miserably.

Three weeks into the campaign, the Department of Education said it was only able to raise a scant of the P500 million it needed to reconstruct the schools and replace the damaged learning materials.

The Depted had hoped to raise the amount by Feb. 14 so it could finish the reconstruction before the school opening in June.

On Jan. 10 at the launching of their "Kapit Sikwela (Save Our Schools)" campaign, Education Secretary Florencio Abad said he felt confident they could raise P500 million in a month's time. They even raised P21 million that day.

On Monday, Abad dejectedly admitted they had failed to reach their target.

The Depted expected it had so far received P68.1 million in donations from 14 private foundations and companies, including the donation-free government.

The Australian government had been the first to contribute to the campaign, donating A$400,000 or P17.4 million last December.

Other groups that contributed were the Coca-Cola Foundation, Bingpinas, BSB Foundation, Asian Coalition Cojuangco Foundation, GMA Kapuso Foundation, Lan Lan Memorial Foundation, Mirant-Philippines Foundation, Petron Foundation, Provident Depot Inc., Readers' Digest, ITI Colleges, United Nations Children's Fund and the United Teachers Credit Cooperative.

The Depted said its present budget and the forthcoming funds from the National Disaster Coordinating Council could hardly cover the needed P6.08 million.

Check or cash donations are accepted at the Bagly Sikwela Secretariat at the Depted General Office in Pasig City. A contribution will be rewarded with a tax certificate worth 150 percent of the donation. For more information, the Depted could be reached at 633-1779 or its website, www.sagipsikwela.ph.

Meanwhile, Abad was shocked that some public school teachers had opposed his draft order not to hold extracurricular activities during class hours.

"The idea came from them. They were complaining to me [that these activities] get in the way of their teaching," he said.

Nevertheless, Abad refrained from signing the draft order. Instead, he said the measure was premature since it would be the prerogative of the teachers first.

Last week, the secretary said he would soon be signing a memorandum that would ban what he deemed were unnecessary class suspensions.

According to the order, public schools could no longer hold beauty contests, talent searches, sports fests, parades and the like during school days.

Only a few of the public school teachers interviewed by media agreed with the order.

They did not agree that limiting extracurricular activities would forestall the students' performance. They said such activities were part of the learning process.

PRINT TOWN GOES TO CEBU

Inquirer chair Marixi R. Prieto lowers the first capsule during groundbreaking rites for the new home of Print Town, Cebu Daily News and Philippine Daily Inquirer in the North Reclamation Area in Cebu City. Looking on are, from left, Gil Pangilinan, Print Town director; Paulo Prieto, PDI-T president; Inquirer Publications Inc. chair Ma. Lulu Luneta Montes; Print Town vice president, Glenn Mangahas; CDN-Inquirer Publications Inc. publisher and Manila Bulletin Publishing Corp. chair Emilio Yap; Inquirer Publications Inc. president Isaac de los Santos; Prieto; and Ma. Lourdes Montes, Print Town vice president. Glenn Mangahas; CDN-Inquirer Publications Inc. publisher and Manila Bulletin, Print Town chair. The time capsule contained bottles of ink, samples, the Feb. 8 issues of PDI, CDN and Bulletin and the aluminum plates used in the production of the day's issue.

Senate has the numbers to archive VAT—Osmeña

By Christine O. Avendaño

OPPOSITION Sen. Sergio Osmeña III yesterday proposed that the Senate "archive" the bill to increase the value-added tax (VAT) rate, claiming that those opposed to the measure already had the numbers to defeat it.

Osmeña counted 12 senators as supporters of the measure—the same number minority bloc plus three from the administration.

Administration Senators Juan Ponce Enrile, Manuel Villar and Rodolfo Biazon are against the 1st vice rate, which seeks to increase the VAT rate from 10 percent to 12 percent, claiming it would directly hit the middle class and the poor.

But Sen. Ralph Recto, chair of the Senate committee on ways and means, shrugged off Osmeña's suggestion.

"I don't think that there is any serious move to archive the bill," Recto told reporters after a rare Senate committee hearing.

He was confident that at the end of the day, majority of the 23 member Senate would come out with an "acceptable" VAT law, something that he said would be "progressive, just and fair."

Recto said the VAT hearings would continue for one more week before his committee comes out with a report for the plenary.

Finance Secretary Cesar Purisima told the hearing that the VAT will raise the country's "most ever to implement."

He said that in other countries, this is not the primary source of revenue and that the Philippines' 10-percent VAT rate was the lowest among countries using the VAT system.

Purisima told reporters after the hearing that the Senate would consider other tax measures instead of the VAT bill.

Recto said his committee would likely continue over with a two-tiered VAT rate.

"We will be imposing additional excise taxes on goods consumed by the affluent," he said, possibly by increasing from 20 percent to 40 percent the excise tax on luxury consumption.

Recto said the committee also planned to impose a VAT on oil products but there was still no consensus on the issue.

He said the committee already had a consensus on items that would not be placed under the VAT—salaried workers and agricultural products in their original state.

Meanwhile, Lt. Shaddai Enterprises Inc. Mike Abante yesterday expressed support for the VAT bill, saying it would exempt the basic necessities like the poor scenarios.

If Shaddai's hundreds of thousands of members mostly come from the poor.

Abante said a caucus on VAT was held by El Shaddai leaders and most of them agreed that VAT would benefit the country.

"We have to look at the aggregate. Income had explained that the additional revenues from the increased VAT would save the country from its economic woes. With a report from Willie Oliver

No fireworks in Mike, Jamby face-off

By Michael Lim Ubac

SEN. JAMBY Madrigal and Environment Secretary Mike Defensor finally had their face-off last night at the Senate, with the senator calling the DENR secretary the "problem" of the nation's natural resources.

But under no circumstances, Madrigal said Defensor still had not kissed and made up at the start of the Senate deliberations on the budget of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

Madrigal tried to impress upon the "juvenile" Defensor that young as he is, he should be more accountable to the people whom it came to the area of the country's environment.

"At his disposal, he controls a department that is crucial to the constitutional principle on the protection of the ecology and protection of natural patrimony," said Madrigal.

A skeptical Defensor, who had lamented the lot of the senator for unnecessarily linking the Madrigal family to cutting and logging operations in the provinces of Quezon and Aurora, simply smiled.

Defensor was in the Senate to help free. Manuel Villar, chair of the Senate finance committee, defend the DENR budget.

Madrigal said that the tickler is some agreement (TA) issued by the DENR was "a privilege and a right."

"The power to award [an] environmental compliance certificate (ECC) is the secretary. Therefore, if it's not the best interest of the nation, he should decide on what's best for the environment," she said.

"So why can't he rescind the TAs issued by his predecessor[s]? He knows that the [TAs are] destructive to the environment," added Madrigal.

Villar, sponsor of the DENR budget, repeatedly moved for the suspension of the session because Defensor could not provide the answers.

Noting that the suspensions were delaying the proceedings, Madrigal then moved to suspend the session rules so that hearing agency or department heads concerned from directly answering during budget interpellations.

"Because of the technical nature of my questions, it will be better if the representative of the DENR will personally answer my questions," said Madrigal.

All the senators present then agreed to suspend the rules, and resumed the interpellations for 4 p.m.

Doctors quote Freud to explain why facelifts should not be taxed

By Carlos Paulo

IS COSMETIC surgery "pure and simple vanity" or is it an "essential medical need"?

Manuel and Rosario Calayan, a husband-and-wife team of cosmetic surgeons, yesterday dug into psychological theory to argue that it is a medical necessity in a bid to block congressional attempts to tax cosmetic and other "body-enhancement" services.

The Calayans appeared at a House ways and means committee hearing on House Bill No. 4654, seeking to impose a 10 percent value-added tax and 20 percent excise tax on a list of "non-essential" goods and services, including cosmetic surgery.

Reading from a joint statement, Rosario Calayan recited a 1930 book written by Dr. Karl Menninger entitled "The Human Mind" which explained the "theory of subconscious conflict" of Sigmund Freud, the Austrian neurologist who founded psychoanalysis.

She said that from such an explanation of Freudian theory, Menninger had recommended that "[where] it is possible by means of medical, surgical, dental and other devices to correct some of the actual imperfection, such treatment is in fact indispensable."

Rosario Calayan argued that cosmetic surgeons heal not just physical injuries but also emotional pain and give back to a "limited" individual "a renewed feeling of themselves, capable of facing the world, making them more productive and forward looking."

The doctor and the relentless word" just a fraction of the tax collection that we expect to."

She said that most of the patients they treat have a "bitter need" or "material necessity" to look better, citing as an example removing wrinkles from an old woman who needs to look younger to retain a philandering husband.

Marisol Calayan said taking cosmetic surgery would kill an industry with enormous potential for "medical tourism," citing the cases of Thailand in catering to foreigners seeking cosmetic treatment abroad.

He said Thailand raised a total of 600,000 foreigners in 2003, earning $6.5 million.

But the bill's author, Bicolano Rep. Marissa Abaya, was unconvinced.

He said it did not follow that cosmetic surgery would help a wife win back a philandering husband as a woman's looks may not be the only reason why a husband would stray.

File complaints, CAP clients urged

By Lala B. Saavedra

THE NATIONAL Bureau of Investigation yesterday called on plan holders of College Assurance Plan Philippines Inc. (CAP) whose checks had been dishonored to file formal complaints with the bureau to enable it to determine what charges to bring against the cash-strapped pre-need company.

"We're focusing on the [senior] officers on the midlevel," said NBI Director Reynaldo Esmeralda. "We need reports that some of the funds had been misdirected or misused or [the] reasons after checks issued by the company were rejected.

According to Wenceslao, large-scale syndicate one of the possible complaints that could be filed against CAP because of the checks dishonored.

A panel came from the Special Action Unit of the NBI was created to handle the case after Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez earlier ordered the bureau to investigate the problems confronting CAP.

In the agenda from the bureau's Special Action Unit have received 15 colleges and universities in the Manila metropolis reported that CAP or were last linked to cash the checks. Most of the schools were located in Manila's university belt.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Loren, Susan warn PET of 'plot'

FORMER Sen. Loren Legarda and Susan Enrile, the widow of movie star Fernando Poe Jr., have alerted the Presidential Electoral Tribunal of a plot to allegedly tamper with the ballots involved in the opposition's election protest against President Macapagal-Arroyo and Vice President Noli de Castro.

In separate motions, Enrile and Legarda asked the tribunal to allow them to post watchers to guard the ballot boxes after they allegedly learned that "sinocopo-boss quarters" were planning to tamper with the ballot boxes and other election documents.

Legarda was the vice presidential running mate of Poe, the opposition standard-bearer in the May 10, 2004, elections which they lost to Ms Arroyo and Mr Castro.

Enrile and Legarda filed electoral protests with the PET, claiming that they were cheated.

Poe's bid sought to make up for his husband's election protest as a so-called "intervenor-substitute."

Enrile and Legarda asked that they be allowed to post at least four watchers to safeguard the ballots, which are in the custody of Congress.

Legarda said that while the tribunal had ordered Congress to take the necessary measures to preserve and protect the integrity of the ballot boxes involved in her protest, it overlooked her motion for an earlier inspection and an inventory of the ballot boxes.

She said an earlier inspection would ensure that the ballot boxes were still intact while an inventory would determine and segregate the ballot boxes involved in her protest from those which are not.

Last Monday, Dr. Cecilio asked the tribunal to reconsider the ruling and dismiss Legarda's election protest which, he said, "resorted more of propaganda, will remain in place as a political speech but will not implant fraud facts."

The high tribunal has yet to rule on Enrile's motion to be allowed to substitute for her late husband. Philip C. Salvosa

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Do you need all these men, Mikey?

WHAT'S it all about, Mikey?

[illegible] Sentinel, the heavens hosted twice-day beau a well-planned soiree.

President Macapagal-Arroyo's eldest son, his wife Angela Montenegro, and their child Mikaela Gloria arrived at the airport from Hong Kong via Philippine Airlines' flight No. 019 shortly before 5 p.m.

"I can't see the logic why there should be so many PSG men picking up the members of the First Family," said the source, who is privy to airport security matters.

When the family left for Hong Kong on Friday, only 13 PSG men were there off, the source said.

For the arrival of Mikey and his family, airport officials were initially informed that around six PSG men would be deployed, according to the source. Later, however, the source said, another 20 were deployed supposedly because Mikey's father was to be at the airport to welcome them home.

But as it turned out, the President's first-born, Jose Miguel "Mike" Arroyo, did not make it to the airport.

Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye declined to comment on the matter, saying he had yet to verify the report. The PSG did not return calls from the Inquirer.

Except for Lufi

Last December, Mike Arroyo himself arrived from abroad and requested 30 special escort passes for the PSG from the Manila International Airport Authority (MIAA), the source said.

"Most passes for the PSG are requested if the President herself moves her husband or the airport," he said.

Quite a number of PSG men are also deployed to the airport whenever the PSG Captain's youngest son Orandodo (Lufi), his wife Rahal Makiri, or Mikey's wife Angela go on trips, whether international or domestic, the source said.

The First Couple's only daughter, Evangeline Claire, is the exception, according to the source.

Level of threat

Lufi, who has maintained a low key image since her mother became President in 2001, usually has only four or five security men escorting her off, the source said.

Replying to questions from the Inquirer on the matter, Angel Morales, MIAA assistant general manager for security and emergency purposes, said the number of PSG men deployed to the airport depended on the kind of engagement of the members of the First Family and the level of the threat against them.

"It is the group commander of the PSG that will decide how many I-level would be assigned when a member of the First Family leaves," said the retired brigadier general.

Morales said the numbers mentioned by the Inquirer source could have reached that many because each member of the First Family had his or her own security men assigned to them.

"If they are all together at the airport, then there would be many PSG men there," he said.

Dictates of protocol

Protocol dictates that the President, Vice President, Chief Justice, Senate President, Speaker of the House, and heads of mission, such as a visiting Cabinet minister from another country, be exempt from security checks, Morales also said.

The privilege is extended to the members of the immediate family of the President and Vice President, he added.

Let's impeach GMA, Nene tells Philconsa

From page A1

her own purposes during the presidential election last year.

- Illegal authorization of the payment of $68 million (P3.762 billion) for the purchase of six search and rescue vessels for the Coast Guard without congressional authority.

- Willful and blatant abuse of her appointing power by naming undersecretaries and assistant secretaries in excess of the number authorized by the Administrative Code.

"I suggest that Philconsa do what Jeroboam told the Israelites at Thermopylae some 2,500 years ago: 'Here's where we draw the line and beyond it, you shall not pass' to Gma, Philcon, perhaps, might in another thing the necessary impeachment papers against the President as was implied in the," Pimentel said.

He made the call during Philconsa's observance of Constitution Day at the Manila Polo Club in Forbes Park, Makati.

Shocked

About 200 Philconsa members and guests, including Sen. Alfredo Lim, Bulletin publisher Emilio Yap, former Justice Secretary Jose Lina and Supreme Court Justice Adolf Azcuna, applauded Pimentel after his speech.

Philconsa president Manuel Luzariaga and chair Gonzalo Istrella refused to issue any comment.

Pimentel told the lawyers that the audience was "shocked."

"They thought it was just an ordinary speech. But when [Philconsa] officers say they will work on it," said the senator, assuring that Philconsa "is supposed to be the organization created to defend the Constitution."

Headline-baiting

Malacañang ordered an inquiry in returning Pimentel's charges but did not answer the specific charges aired by the opposition senator.

"President Arroyo's acts as mentioned were lawful, constitutional and [done] in the interest of the people and the nation," Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye said in a text message.

Bunye said the country needed unity, not "hate politics" because "more politics will only aggravate the economy."

"Senator Pimentel is obviously headline baiting and is not helping our people overcome the overriding problem in the economy," Bunye said.

"Nevertheless, we are ready to answer any of these charges, however absurd they may be, if the good senator would wish to push this charade through the legal mill," he said.

Philhealth

On the first charge, Pimentel said the President used some P1.4 billion in road user's tax to fund low- "patently partisan political project: Bahala Na'ts, Alagang Norte" during the presidential campaign.

He said the President also authorized the transfer of some P92 billion from Owwa back to the Philippine Health Insurance Corp. supposedly to enable the poor to gain access to public health services.

"While the objectives might have been good, it was still wrong for the President to have done so. The reason is that the road user's fund and the Owwa fund are trust funds," Pimentel said. "The funds, therefore, cannot be used for any purpose other than that specified in the law that created them."

He said the Constitution mandated that "all money collected on any tax levied for a special purpose shall be treated as a special fund and paid out for such purpose."

Pimentel said that by misusing the road funds of the road user's fees and the Owwa, at the very least, "she betrayed the public trust for which she should be made answerable."

On the second charge, Pimentel said the President gave "full payment" on July 30, 2001 to then Transportation Secretary Perfecto Ablaza to negotiate in behalf of the Republic an agreement on a $71.14-million loan for the acquisition of six vessels.

The President then ordered the release of special allotment release orders on various occasions to cover the cost ($68.4 million or some P3.762 billion) of acquiring the six vessels for the Coast Guard.

Pimentel believed it was wrong of the President to have done so, citing Article VI, Section 25 (1) of the Constitution, which provides that no money shall be paid out of the treasury except when appropriated by law.

"By illegally authorizing the payment of the vessels in question without any congressional appropriation, the President culpably violated the Constitution for which she is answerable," the senator said.

Power to appoint not absolute

On the third charge, Pimentel said the President abused her power of appointment by appointing undersecretaries and assistant secretaries in excess of the number authorized by the Administrative Code of 1987.

"While the power of the President to fill up offices created by law is acknowledged, the presidential power to appoint is circumscribed by applicable laws. In other words, the power to appoint is not absolute. It is limited not only by the qualifications requirement or disqualifications but also by law as to the number of offices that must be filled up," he said.

Citing an example, Pimentel said the President appointed six undersecretaries and six assistant secretaries to the defense department although the Administrative Code provided for only one undersecretary and five undersecretaries—one commissioner and four associate commissioners...in the Bureau of Immigration and Deportation even as Republic Act No. 613, as amended, provided only three.

Mr. Arroyo also "abused her appointing power" by appointing Luis Lorenzo chair of Land Bank of the Philippines, violating its corporate charter which says that the secretary of finance should be the ex officio chair of the bank.

The senator also questioned the appointment of Lorenzo as chair of Quedancorp, "which is contrary to the law which provides that the secretary of agriculture should be the chair of the corporate entity."

Pimentel said the illegal implications of the President's abuse of her appointing power were the promise, that appointed, illegally exercised powers and made decisions that may affect the rights and obligations of the people dealing with them; and illegally collected salaries, perks and per diems that are attached to those offices.

Pimentel said he would not imagine that the President was unaware of the serious implications of her "culpable transgressions of the Constitution and the rule of law," pointing out that although she was not a lawyer, she had a good legal team in Malacañang. With a report from Julie Lobog, Inevelina

LEFT next to office of outgoing Energy Secretary Vicente Perez, outside witnessing alongside President Arroyo the signing on Tuesday of a Memorandum of Understanding between the DENR and the Headwaters Technology Innovation Group. The latter is to infuse $2.26 into a coal conversion facility in the country. (Story on Page 01-2.)

(continued on A2)

THE ORIGINAL!
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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2005

Erap back in hospital; pneumonia, says doc

From page A1

even his mother, are located there.

Estrada had been running a fever for three days, according to Sen. Jinggoy Estrada, his eldest son and co-respondent in the plunder case.

The senator said the relatively mild result, or at the Estrada's 13-hectare resort in Tanay could have caused the fever.

He said his father was reluctant to go to the hospital but that the family had insisted.

Asked whether his father had answered a summons from the Sandiganbayan, the senator replied: "This is an emergency. There are no medical facilities in Tanay. We cannot say yet how long he will have to stay in hospital. It all depends on the doctors. Anyway, we have informed the sheriff. But this has nothing to do with his illness."

Contacted by reporters, Sandiganbayan chief Sheriff Ed Urieta said no court processes were violated when the 67-year-old ex-President was moved from Tanay to San Juan.

"Everything was coordinated," he said, confirming that he was apprised of Estrada's situation prior to the transfer.

Urieta also said he went to the Cardinal Santos Memorial Hospital to check on the ousted leader's condition preparatory to submitting a "report" to the justices of the special division hearing his plunder case.

Lung infection

Another of Estrada's sons, Sen. Jinjo Binay IV Ejercito, confirmed his father's condition.

"He has pneumonia [and his] right lung is infected," Ejercito said in a text message. "He is confined on doctor's orders [and will stay in the hospital for] around three days."

But this should be no cause for alarm, Ejercito said, adding: "It's just a checkup."

Hooson said Estrada was coughing earlier yesterday and complaining of feeling pain all over his body.

He said this was why he had ordered an X-ray test for his patient.

Estrada is under the care of Dr. Cecil Tuly, head of the hospital's pulmonary medicine division, according to Perdie Ramos, one of the

JINGGOY ESTRADA: This is an emergency, there's no need to ask the court's permission.

ex-President's media handlers.

No special treatment

In Malacañang, Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye denied that Estrada was being given special treatment.

Bunye said Estrada's being taken to hospital was "a normal response to a medical emergency."

"He should be given medical assistance," Bunye said.

Special Prosecutor Dennis Villa-Ignacio said state prosecutors saw nothing wrong with the development. But he said Estrada's lawyers should eventually submit a formal motion to transfer the Sandiganbayan detainee.

No problem

"It's OK with us if it's an emergency. If it a reason of health, then we have no problem with that. But as long as he is going to seek treatment in a hospital, it's OK with us," Villa-Ignacio said.

Before Estrada was transferred to Tanay last year, he was detained at the Veterans Memorial Medical Center in Quezon City.

With reports from Luige A. del Puerto and Ed Cabacungan Jr.

Ang Pula. Ang Puti. Sa Mendiola Ang Uwi!
San Beda College
2005 Alumni Homecoming
February 19, 2005, Saturday. Alumni Mass at 6pm.
Bedan Fellowship night follows thereafter!
Food is catered by TGI Fridays.

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RP calls on 'Yard' to solve Pinoy's murder

THE GOVERNMENT has asked Scotland Yard to get to the bottom of the killing of a Filipino ship captain aboard a British-owned motor tanker and identify his killers among the Filipino crewmen.

Foreign Secretary Alberto G. Romulo instructed the Philippine Embassy in London to coordinate with Scotland Yard and British maritime authorities to establish the circumstances behind the slaying of Capt. Walfredo Banta.

Undisclosed

Since the case is under inquest, the circumstances of the crime have not been disclosed by the local police, officials said.

"We're seeking assistance from Scotland Yard. We're asking them to thoroughly investigate the case so the killers could be identified," Jose S. Brillantes, undersecretary for migrant workers affairs, told reporters.

Attacked

Banta died from injuries he sustained when he was attacked by an "undetermined number" of men while the M/T Overseas Josefa Camejo was traveling from Venezuela to Sweden on the night of Feb. 3, the officials said.

"Despite medical attention immediately administered by trained crew members and by an emergency medical team dispatched to the vessel, Captain Banta's injuries proved fatal," said Department of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Gilberto Asuque.

The vessel was four miles off the English coast when the incident happened.

All-Filipino

The tanker, manned by an all-Filipino crew and set of officers, is docked at the port of Brixham in the United Kingdom, where the case has been endorsed to the British authorities, according to Asuque.

Banta's wife, Mylene, flew to the UK over the weekend. His brother, Gualberto, was to follow her yesterday.

"We're asking the manning agencies to allow the relatives to fly to London and to arrange for everything in case charges are to be filed [against the perpetrators]," Brillantes said. *TJ Burgonio*

Unfazed by threats, GMA cancels Diwalwal visit anyway

By Gil Cabacungan Jr. and Veh Contreras

MALACAÑANG, a breaking off conversation in surprised threats to attack foreign mining companies that would dare dig for precious metals in their territory.

President Macapagal-Arroyo, however, wasn't taking any chances. She canceled her planned visit to Mt. Diwalwal, a gold-rich region with a history of uncontrolled violence.

"The foreign mining firms are coming in [Saturday] the circumstances and environment and our have not seen any loss of interest on the part of mining companies," said Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye in a briefing.

Commander Jerry of the Philippine spokesperson Gregorio "Ka Roger" Rosal said in a radio dublé: "We will not allow mining companies to operate inside guerrilla fronts. If they insist on the mission destruction of the environment, our forces are sure to launch all available means to paralyze their operations and boot them out of the guerrilla zones."

Bunye said the government was only protecting responsible mining and that it wanted to exploit the country's resources for good economic use.

"Like other Filipinos, we are also concerned about the environment. We're also concerned about the proper treatment of indigenous people, to the just and equitable share of local governments in the proceeds of the utilization of natural resources. We see nothing wrong in pushing for sustainable mining," he said.

Bunye, however, admitted that the President canceled her visit to one of the country's most promising mine sites because of the threat. "That is definitely connected. I guess that you will understand why the has to be postponed."

Environment Secretary Michael Defensor yesterday downplayed the impact of the latest threat issued by the New People's Army saying he had yet to hear foreign mining companies express anxiety over the NPA presence in the countryside.

"Most of them go their assurance from their counterparts who have been [operating] here for the last decade," Defensor said, when asked how he managed to allay anxiety concerns among mining investors poised to enter the country.

"It was never a concern raised to me by investors whether formally during [last week's mining] conference [in Makati City] or informally in my small talks with them," he told the Inquirer.

Coal as alternative fuel eyed

THE PHILIPPINES and a major American company yesterday agreed to explore the possibility of establishing a pilot plant to convert coal into clean, alternative fuel under a deal that was already mentioned to position the country as South-east Asia's hub for coal-to-gasoline conversion.

President Macapagal-Arroyo witnessed the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Energy and Headwaters Inc., which plans to employ world-class technology to convert the country's indigenous coal into an alternative source of fuel.

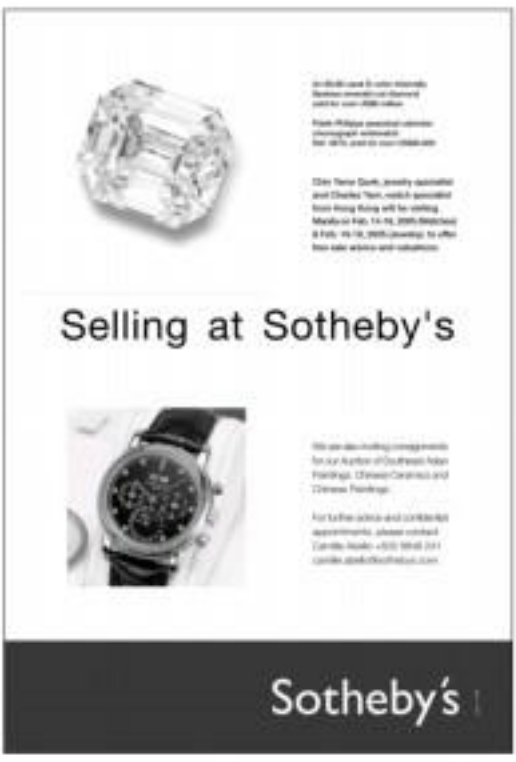
The MOU was signed by Energy Undersecretary Rino Anthony Abaya and Headwaters Inc. president Craig Hickman in a ceremony held in Malacañang. Outgoing Energy Secretary Vicente Perez also witnessed the signing.

The MOU provides for the construction of a 25 kg/day pilot plant to determine the feasibility of using indigenous coal. Once found feasible, the pilot plant will be expanded to a 50-70,000 barrels/day fuel-producing plant for domestic use and limited exporting.

The DOE said one of the country's cheap and abundant coal supply as a relatively clean substitute for oil was a major thrust to achieve energy independence and end the country's dependence on imported oil.

"The Philippines will be the first country in the world, next to China, to use clean alternative resource fuels," the DOE said.

Heidi Lardizabal



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US Pac

ADMIRAL Thomas Fargo, commander of the United States Pacific Command (Pacom), meets today with President Macapagal-Arroyo and senior Philippine officials to discuss RP-US military-to-military security cooperation activities, including Philippine defense reform and enhancing the country's capacity to counter terrorism.

Fargo's visit is his fifth to the Philippines as Pacom commander. He assumed the post in May 2002. The visit is part of a routine swing through the region which includes a stop in Japan.

In December 2004, Defense Secretary Avelino J. Cruz Jr. and senior Filipino defense officials visited US Pacific Command in Honolulu, Hawaii, to meet with Fargo and review programs for the war on terrorism and reform initiatives.

Fargo's visit is an opportunity to affirm the strength of the RP-US alliance and to emphasize the value of the Philippines' continued support of Operation Enduring Freedom and the global war on terrorism, a US Embassy news release said yesterday.

Tsunami aid meet set in RP

THE ASIAN Development Bank will host a high-level meeting in Manila next month to coordinate international aid to tsunami-affected countries, ADB president Haruhiko Kuroda announced Tuesday.

Kuroda told reporters the meeting will "take stock of recovery achievements and pledges of support" and to reach a "common understanding" of the major considerations in the delivery of rehabilitation and reconstruction programs to the affected countries over the next four to five years.

"The meeting will help ensure that the world's attention remains focused on tsunami support and that donor support for, and confidence in, the affected countries remain high," he said.

He said he will invite ministers from tsunami-affected countries and donor nations, plus representatives from the United Nations, the World Bank and other multilateral institutions to the March 18 meeting in Manila.

Kuroda noted that response to the disaster was shifting from relief to rehabilitation and reconstruction.

He said the ADB and the World Bank were conducting an assessment of the needs of the affected countries and a report would be finished before the meeting.

The Manila-based bank has identified $600 million in readily available funds for affected countries and another $175 million in reprogrammed funding for Indonesia, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and India, Kuroda said. *AP*

Gays urge gov't to allow same-sex unions

A GAY rights group on Tuesday urged the government to follow the lead of countries that recognize homosexual unions.

Military spokespersons, however, insisted the communist New People's Army (NPA) enjoying their recently announced recognition of same-sex unions was a publicity stunt and showed how isolated they were from the largely conservative Catholic population of the country.

The big rally on Monday carried overtones of a ground-breaking marriage ceremony between two male NPA guerrillas, who married in a jungle altar under a canopy of assault rifles.

Pro-Gay, a left-of-homosexual rights group, praised the rebels in a statement, saying they were "one with movements elsewhere in advancing gay rights."

They challenged the devoutly Catholic President Macapagal-Arroyo to "enact laws and policies that would humanize the equality of gay and lesbian Filipinos."

"Instead of branding homosexual marriages as immoral, the government should be taking steps to follow the example of the NPA by legalizing domestic partnerships and becoming gay families."

Army spokesperson Maj. Ronaldson Rosario shrugged off the communists' canoodling saying, "This is part of propaganda to entice guys to join the NPA. But I know guys are wise enough and look beyond that (pro-gay) issue," Rosario said.

Military spokesperson Lt. Col. Buenaventura Nuezca was more dismissive, saying the marriage "proves the NPA have no religion."

The NPA has been waging a bloody insurgency campaign for more than three decades that has claimed thousands of lives.

The group says it sanctions marriages only in areas where it operates. Still, guerrillas usually require permission from their superiors to get married. AFP

WOMAN PRESIDENTS

Arthur Almond 100 years, the University of the Philippines finally has a woman president. President Macapagal-Arroyo swears in former UP Diliman Chancellor Emerlinda Roman as Malacañang. AFP/ROLEX DELA PEÑA

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By Gil Cabacungan Jr.

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo will show her love for 1.4 million government employees on Valentine's Day by giving each one a cash gift of at least P1,000, enough to buy dinner for two in a modest restaurant.

Prime Secretary Ignacio Bunye said the employees could get a bigger "Valentine bonus" on Feb. 14 depending on the Department of Budget and Management's final computation on how much the government saved from Mrs Arroyo's austerity measures last year.

The President decided to distribute the productivity enhancement pay evenly among the bureaucracy to reward the successful compliance to her belt-tightening measures ranging from curbside to electricity and fuel consumption to cancellation of foreign trips, seminars and parties to control the budget deficit.

Bunye said in a radio interview that the DBM had initially projected savings of at least P3 billion, but the amount could be higher as some disbursements had yet to submit their final reports.

"It's anywhere from P1,000 to P2,000; we will decide after all the reports have been consolidated," he said.

The savings contributed significantly to reducing last year's budget deficit to P146.7 billion from the FY05 6-billion target.

Unconfirmed reports said that the bonus was a one-time gift on top of the usual Christmas bonus and 13th month pay and would be granted only if more savings were generated this year.

While the government is generous in giving out gifts for Valentine's, it is prudent when it comes to granting government employees their long-denied salary increases, it was noted.

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18 death row convicts get 90-day lease on life

EIGHTEEN inmates facing the death penalty were granted a 90-day reprieve last month by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, according to Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez yesterday.

Gonzalez said the President ordered the reprieves on Jan. 20, thereby staying the dates of execution of the convicts in May.

The reprieves give lawyers for the convicts more time to review their cases, with the possibility that the cases may be returned to court and the death sentences commuted.

Ms Arroyo earlier imposed a moratorium on the executions due to pressure from the influential Catholic Church. Gonzalez, who later changed her mind and said she did not support any death penalty would be executed after strong lobbying from the Chinese Filipino community.

However, no one has yet been executed under her term.

"Contrary reports and communications in our absolute power of the President. The Commission gave her that authority. She does not intend to give an explanation," Gonzalez said.

Gonzalez, however, did not reveal the crimes the convicts were sentenced for.

Gonzalez said the President could again grant them reprieves before their execution dates are due. Philip C. Tubeza, with a report from AFP

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The WORLD

Editor Lawrence B. Ibarra

Israel, Palestine set to declare ceasefire

SHARM EL-SHEIKH—Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas were set to announce the end of four years of violence at a landmark summit in Egypt Tuesday, setting the stage for a full-scale revival of the peace process.

The summit, the first between Israeli and Palestinian leaders for over four years, comes amid a growing rapprochement after the moderate Abbas' election a month ago and a new commitment by the United States to seek Middle East peace.

The pair are scheduled to meet after Sharon holds his first ever meeting with the summit host, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

Senior Israeli and Palestinian officials have already announced that after two months of preparatory talks, Abbas and Sharon would be able to announce a truce ceasefire at their meeting in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh.

"A ceasefire agreement has been reached and it will be publicly declared," said Palestinian Foreign Minister Nabil Shaath after arriving at the heavily guarded summit venue.

The delegations would discuss an end to Israel's pursuit of wanted militants and the return of West Bank Palestinian cities have been ceded to the Gaza Strip, he added.

A source close to Sharon said that during the summit, Israel will announce an end to military operations while the Palestinians will declare a ceasefire.

"If the terrorist attacks and violence cease, there will be no need for us to launch operations, because calm responds to calm."

Any joint statement is also expected to include agreements on issues such as the transfer of security control in parts of the West Bank to Israeli's pullout of Jericho and a half years of violence which has so far claimed some more than 4,700 lives.

The summit comes just a day after new US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice wrapped up a visit to the region declaring that both Sharon and Abbas had both accepted invitations to meet US President George W. Bush at the White House.

She also announced the appointment of a US security paterman for the Middle East, heading what she called the "most promising moment for progress ... in many years."

The summit was to get formally underway with an address by Mubarak followed by the other leaders. Jordan's King Abdullah II was also attending.

But Israeli security services were on high alert for fear of attacks by Palestinian militants aimed at sabotaging the summit.

"Our security has been reinforced, we have deployed extra men along the expected line (the West Bank border) as well as along roads, in the center of towns, anywhere people gather," police commissioner Kobi Cohen told Israeli radio. AFP

AIR Dutch's Apache helicopter hovers over the debris of the crashed Afghan Ram Air Boeing 737 lying on the snowy mountain of Chapeti, 30 km southeast of Kabul, Afghanistan, on Monday. AP

Snow thwarts plans to retrieve bodies from wreckage of crashed Afghan jet

BIST SOME, Afghanistan—Fresh snow dimmed hopes on Tuesday that troops could retrieve the first bodies from the wreckage of an Afghan airliner which crashed in to a freezing mountaintop last week with the apparent loss of all 104 people on board.

Nine soldiers on Monday found human remains but no survivors at the crash site 30 km east of Kabul and plans were laid to fly Afghan medical teams and investigators to the scene to begin the gruesome task of collecting body parts.

But an Afghan army spokesperson said troops who tried to camp near the site had been forced to descend by the freezing temperatures, while heavy cloud cover was keeping helicopters on the ground.

"They'll try to go back up on foot today, but the best chance is from the air," spokesperson Brig. Mohammad Arif Aziz said. "We need God's help."

The Boeing 737-300, flown by Siri Air, Afghanistan's first post-Taliban private airline, crashed last Thursday after it approached Kabul airport in a snowstorm from the northern city of Herat.

Officials say it was carrying 91 passengers and eight crew—most of them Afghans, but also including more than 30 foreigners—preparing to go back up on foot today, but the best chance is from the air," spokesperson Brig. Mohammad Arif Aziz said. "We need God's help."

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Asian quake, tsunami moved islands, shortened days

JAKARTA—The massive earthquake that triggered the Asian tsunami wobbled the earth on its axis, lowered mountains back to the dressing board and changed time by a fraction, but doesn't appear to affect your clocks.

The worries after the tsunami that may have killed 300,000 people on the shores of the Indian Ocean, scientists are discovering, were about the changes wrought by the magnitude 9 quake, the fourth largest in the last century.

The tremor ripped out the sea floor near its epicenter off the northwest coast of Indonesia's Sumatran island and moved several other islands, but scientists say any movement of land more can be measured by instruments rather than tens of meters.

Chris Ji, a seismologist at the California Institute of Technology, said he found movements along the fault line of about 10 meters laterally and four or five meters vertically.

But reports that the center island of Sumatra—1,700 km long and 400 km wide—moved 30 meters or more are wildly inaccurate, scientists say.

"We know we have movements of over a meter, perhaps a couple of meters," said Ken Hudnut, a California-based geophysicist with the US Geological Survey. "But the idea that Sumatra has moved 100 feet is just wrong."

Scientists are working on precise measurements by comparing geographic points whose locations were known before the quake with data now positions using the Global Positioning System, which sends exact locations by satellite.

High-tech British and US ships are investigating changes to the seabed and local authorities are measuring depths in critical shipping channels.

Hidenobu Murata, the US space agency said the Dec. 26 quake—the largest to rattle Earth since 1964 in Alaska—disrupted the planet's rotation and shaved 2.68 microseconds, or millionths of a second, from the length of a day.

Nasa scientists B. F. Chao and Richard Gross calculated it shifted Earth's mass such pole about 2.5 cm and made the planet slightly less oblate, or flattened at the poles.

"Physically, this is analogous to a spinning skater drawing arms close to the body resulting in a faster spin," they wrote in an article in Eos, a publication of the American Geophysical Union.

But they said these changes are based on calculations rather than measurements. The changes are so small they are neither difficult to measure or too small to detect.

Many earthquakes shake the planet's axis and affect its rotation, scientists added, but their impact is too small to measure.

The environmental damage from the tsunami was vast. The killer waves ravaged beaches, crushed coral reefs, smashed thousands of hectares of mangrove forests and inundated coastlines from Thailand to Somalia.

A preliminary survey by Indonesia's government and the United Nations Environmental Program (Unep) estimated the economic cost to the environment at $675 million in Indonesia alone.

The survey said 23,000 hectares of mangroves and 25,000 hectares round reefs were damaged.

Some coral reefs...underwater gardens that act as shelter and nursery to a wide range of marine species—were crushed by the waves. Corals grow slowly, some only a few centimeters a year, so their recovery could take decades.

John Pet'ratta, a Unep official in Bangkok, said the extent of damage to some of the coral reefs "is very significant, very high—up to 80 percent in some places. Their recovery was uncertain.

Mangroves, too, cut by the waves will fare better, he said, as they leave behind roots and seeds that will help them regenerate.

"Long-term damage to mangroves by fruit-trees or peasants farmed is really happen," Peterata said. "After five to 10 years you don't even know anything has happened."

But shrubbier of Sumatra's west coast were turned brown by the tsunami as coral polyps and other organisms were swamped by salt water. It could take two or three years for the uncovered land, experts say.

The tsunami waves ate away beaches and coral reefs in Thailand, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, radically changing maps. Reuters

RELIGIOUS BATH: Indian Hindu pilgrims walk on a pontoon on Sangam, the confluence of Rivers Ganges and Yamuna, during the annual traditional bat of Magh Mela in Allahabad, India. Hundreds of thousands of Hindu pilgrims take dips during the Magh Mela, some hoping to wash away sins and others to secure a few spouses, in a not-worshipping tradition older than Hinduism itself. AP

Pope's illness raises question of resignation

VATICAN CITY—With Pope John Paul II likely to spend several more days in hospital following a serious respiratory infection, the question has again arisen whether the ailing pontiff will resign.

The Vatican's senior official, Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano, left the hospital Tuesday in the car Monday night when journalists asked him whether the Pope intended to step down.

"Let's leave that to the Pope's conscience," Sodano said.

Papal resignations is allowed by Church law, but of course all popes have stayed in office until death. In the past there was always the concern that a resigned pope would set up an alternative center of power to create a schism, and church law has no provision for how to treat an ex-pope in his well.

In fact, the last papal resignation dates back to 1458, when the council of Constance deposed two anti-popes who were claiming the papal throne and accepted the abdication of Gregory XII to stop them in order to end a period of schism between rival lines of cardinals.

John Paul made it clear from his hospital bed on Sunday that he was not thinking of leaving. In a speech read on his behalf by an archbishop, he said he was even thinking "to serve the Church and the whole of humanity" even from his hospital bed.

Doctors said the pontiff's condition was steadily improving, according to Vatican spokesperson Joaquin Navarro-Valls, and no further bulletin on his health would be issued until noon Thursday.

He said the Pontiff was eating regularly, sitting in an armchair to read his breviary—the book all priests read daily...and celebrating Mass for members of the medical team.

He was receiving "hundreds if not thousands of very touching messages from around the world," Navarro-Valls said.

However, the Pope's inability to speak the words of the benediction led several newspapers editorialize to ask how incapacitated a pope could be and still continue to reign. In particular, would he be able to appoint cardinals, who play a crucial role in the election of a pope?

In addition Cardinal Jorge Medina said there the Pope might consider stepping down if he spoke additionally incoherently at events where he was unable to celebrate the Mass. But other prelates have been quick to deny this.

Cardinal Alois Tresmorra Rompedda, in charge of church law, played down the voter problem.

He told the Rome newspaper Il Messaggero that there was no cause for concern as long as the Pope remained lucid.

"The question would be settled if his incapacity of words was accompanied by an incapacity to think," Rompedda said. "But with the strength and intention with which the Pope speaks, that's not the case."

Cardinal Sodano said he hoped John Paul II could continue to reign for many years to come.

"We must have full confidence in him. He knows what has to be done," the cardinal said. "Pius IX was pope for 32 years. Leo XIII was pope for 25. John Paul II can surpass this line."

"We are praying at this time for a long life and for the serenity of the Holy Father," said Sodano, who was the day-to-day administration of the Holy See.

The Vatican's rules of succession was widely changed in 2000 when the Pope turned 80, the age at which cardinals are no longer allowed to vote in a papal election.

The Pope was already seriously affected by Parkinson's disease, and French Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger described him as a "prisoner in his body."

The Pope said on his 75th birthday that he had abandoned himself to Christ, and left to Him the decision on when and whether he should be relieved of his service. AFP

Suicide bomber kills 13 in Iraq

BAGHDAD—A suicide bomber killed at least 13 people in an attack at an Iraqi army recruitment center in Baghdad on Tuesday, US army and hospital officials said, in the latest attack on the country's fledgling security forces.

The blast came a day after suicide bombers killed 27 people in attacks in two Iraqi cities—the worst bloodshed since the country's landmark election nine days ago.

Police said the attacker's carpet was a truck carrying recruits into the base, housed in a disused airport. The US military said the bomber was believed to have been on foot.

A plume of black smoke rose into the sky above the recruitment center and ambulances raced to the scene. Hospital officials said all the victims appeared to be young men.

Insurgents frequently attacked Iraqis queuing up to join the police and army. Most of those killed in Monday's blasts in the cities of Mosul and Baquba were either policemen or civilians looking for work with the police.

Al-Qaeda's wing in Iraq, led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, claimed responsibility for these blasts and vowed further attacks on "apostates and their masters," an apparent reference to US-led forces and the Iraqis who work with them.

Iraq's security forces have borne the brunt of attacks by insurgents. The US military is trying to train them to be a fighting force capable of defeating the militants but says it needs more time. The American have also said local police forces are the weakest link in Iraq's security network.

US officials say Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld will lobby Nato allies at a meeting in France this week to provide more money to help train Iraqi security forces.

Nato countries have sent 80 military officers to Iraq to help in the training process but the United States is pushing to increase the number to around 300.

Elsewhere in Baghdad, police said a bomb outside a popular restaurant killed one Iraqi and gunmen ambushed the convoy of an Iraqi politician, killing two of his aides.

The politician, Mithal al-Alusi, who has been a vocal critic of Syria and Iran and was widely criticized in Iraq for visiting Israel last year, survived the attack.

Three Iraqi soldiers and two insurgents were killed in a firefight on a road leading south from Baghdad to the city of Hilla, the Iraqi army said. Eighteen more insurgents were arrested.

There was no further word on the fate of an Italian journalist kidnapped in the capital last month.

An Islamic militant group which claimed the kidnapping said on Monday it would release Giuliana Sgrena soon because she was not a spy. Nothing has been heard of her since then.

The group had initially threatened to kill Sgrena if Italy did not withdraw its 3,000 troops from Iraq. Sgrena works for the Rome-based communist newspaper Il Manifesto, which bitterly opposed the Iraq war. Reuters

Britain sets tougher measures for migrants

LONDON—Prime Minister Tony Blair's government proposed a raft of toughimmigrant Monday to make it harder for unskilled foreigners to work south or shelter in Britain, including English now and Empire printing.

The five-year plan follows a call by the opposition Conservative Party last month for quotas for asylum seekers, as the two hosts up for an expected general election this May in which immigration will be a key theme.

Support groups and trade unions, however, warned of the danger of turning the sensitive area into a political game, with the racist parties each wanting to take the toughest stance on foreigners.

"It is unwanted and unnecessary to use the real problems of asylum and immigration," said Prime Secretary Charles Clarke as he introduced the proposals in parliament.

"It will provide a simple and robust system for economic migration; it will tighten up rules for permanent settlement to ensure that those who stay do bring benefits to the United Kingdom," he said.

The Conservative Party, however, nationally rejected the plan, which includes EU nationals, as "headline-grabbing" rhetoric for headline-grabbing.

"It goes no way toward sorting out an asylum and immigration system, which is a total shambles," said Shadow home secretary David Davis.

"This is the latest headline-grabbing initiative from a panic-stricken government in the run-up to a general election," he told reporters.

Britain currently admits 140,000 to 150,000 immigrants per year.

Under the government's plan, foreigners applying to work in Britain will be considered under a new points-based scheme that will create of four tiers, ranging from highly skilled to low skilled workers.

An independent advisory body will decide which talents are needed and allocate points accordingly.

The salaries of foreign migrant with residency will low as minimum. It right to gain their own permits, and there will be an automatic right for permanent residency for low skilled workers and families. AP

YEAR OF THE ROOSTER: A CHINESE man and his daughter look at Spring Festival decorations in Linhai City, north China's Shanxi Province on Monday. Chinese people are all celebrate the Spring Festival, China's Lunar New Year as the year of rooster. AP

CARNIVAL SEASON. Masked carnival-goers are pictured during the traditional carnival parade in Dunsdorf, western Germany. The street spectacles in the carnival strongholds of Dunsdorf, Mainz and Cologne are watched by hundreds of thousands, marking the highlights in Germany's carnival season. AP

World protests new Togo leader

LOME—Togo's former Gnassingbe was formally sworn in as president on Monday after his father's sudden death, despite widespread condemnation from former colonial power France and African leaders who branded the succession unconstitutional.

Opposition parties called for a "Togo-dead-country" protest over the death, saying they refused to step at home to mark their rejection of what they described as "a military coup."

Gnassingbe was named to the top job by the West African nation's army on Saturday hours after his father died, sparking condemnation from former colonial power France and African leaders who branded the succession unconstitutional.

Opposition parties called for a "Togo-dead-country" protest over the death, saying they refused to step at home to mark their rejection of what they described as "a military coup."

Gnassingbe was named to the top job by the West African nation's army on Saturday hours after his father died, sparking condemnation from fellow African leaders including Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo, who was Africa's longest-serving leader.

Faure Gnassingbe took his oath of office in front of judges and lawmakers. Western diplomats boycotted the ceremony as the presidential palace in the former French colony's capital Lome.

"Before God and before the Togolese people, sole holders of the national sovereignty, I swear Faure Gnassingbe assumes the duties of president of the republic," said the 39-year-old, wearing a suit and a scarf in the red, yellow and green national colors.

Togo sought to limit critics on Monday by banning meetings and demonstrations to retroactively sanction the succession.

Originally the head of the national assembly was meant to take over in the event of the president's death.

But international condemnation still poured in from the region.

"All African leaders should not accept what has happened in that country until there is a democratic transition," Nigeria's leader Olusegun Obasanjo, who chairs the African Union, said in Zambia's capital Lusaka.

"Events that have happened since the death of President Eyadema do not give us comfort that peace will follow," he said.

Lome was calm, with soldiers manning machine-guns around the presidential palace. Borders closed since Saturday reopened.

But in signs of people's edginess, a burst of gunfire in the city center sent residents running for cover. State television later said prison guards had fired warning shots to stop detainees trying to escape from the capital's main jail.

France, whose President Jacques Chirac was a close friend of Eyadema, expressed concern as the changes which depart from the last period process on land down in Togo's constitution. Reuters

SPORTS

Edna Tadiyan S. Melendres

Welcoat forces decider

WELCOAT'S Ryan Ely (left) drives past Purefoo Rogador of Montalvo

By Jeanine W. Reyes

WELCOAT coach Caloy Garcia certainly got his team ready to forge a do-or-die finals showdown.

"Since Sunday, I've been telling the team that the only way to come back from the 2-1 deficit is to win each other," said Garcia after his Painmasters failed the Shawarma Jewels' bid to wrap up the title series, 89-77, yesterday in Game 6 of the PBL Open Classic playoffs at the Makati Coliseum.

"The bench stepped up in this game," added Garcia. "We really didn't want to give up."

Ryan Ely played with a sense of urgency in the final minutes as he scored on a fastbreak to lift the Painmasters, 79-77. He later hauled a foul after a crucial rebound, and then calmly sank his freethrows to put the lead, 84-77, with only 11 seconds left.

The Jewels had a chance to force overtime, but Ely completed his heroic role as he intercepted Alex Compton's pass to Reed Juralla in the dying seconds.

By finished with 12 points after going scoreless in the last two games.

Leo Najarro shot a team-high 18 points, including 10 during Welcoat's decisive third quarter run. Chester Tolentino chipped in 15 points.

Tied at 66, Tolentino and Eugene Tan drew back-to-back triples that gave Welcoat a 72-68 edge, less than four minutes remaining.

Compton and Juralla, however, put the Jewels back on top, 73-72.

After Martin Ortiguerra drilled four straight points to wrest back a Welcoat lead, 78-75, Jon Dan Salvador responded for a 77-76 Jewels advantage.

It was then that Ely took charge.

Welcoat survived the top scrape at home of Alex Compton, who shot a game-high 30 points, including 18 from the three-point area.

Tied at 47, Majorda scored the three-point play that gave the Painmasters a 50-47 lead with 6:40 left in the third quarter.

Compton, however, scored three key triples early in the fourth quarter to tie the ballgame once again, 66-66.

The Painmasters rallied by as many as 10 points, 24-14, in the second period, but they unloaded a 13-0 bomb to turn the game, 24-24. But Compton rallied the Jewels back for a 28-28 halftime advantage.

Ambrose Washington struggled offensively for the first time in the finals series, scoring only nine points.

The Painmasters again committed too many errors, giving up 20 points out of 24 turnovers. But their roller lineup again allowed them to beat the Jewels off the boards, 43-27.

THE SCORE

WELCOAT (89)— Najarro 18, Tolentino 15, Ely 12, Ortiguerra 11, Montenegro 6, Tan 5, Majorda 4, Lanting 4, Gandeza 2, Labrado 0, Reyes 0.

SHAWARMA (77)— Compton 30, Juralla 15, Magpayo 10, Arriola 8, Dela Cruz 6, Llanos 4, Ramirez 4, Augusto 2, Vergara 1, Mercado 1, Espinosa.

Quarters: 14-13, 28-28, 57-51, 89-77.

Asi lawyers blast, 'amuse' Eala no end

THE PBA suffers from a credibility problem with commissioner Noli Eala calling the shots, according to representatives of Talk N Text, who are waging a battle against the league over the Tenfold ownership case.

Phone Pals spokesperson Boy Espinosa and his business lawyer Eduardo Francisco somewhat allegedlies for the PBA as people's man he no hand with great leadership.

Instead of issuing Eala's no-win (but statements, though, Espinosa and Francisco threw an avuncle double.

"Eala is guilty of so many senseless statements," said Espinosa, who is also a lawyer. "There's something wrong with Eala's leadership. The PBA has [had] so many crises which [would] not [have] happened under former commissioners Rudy Salud and Jun Bernardo."

The comment hardly ruffled Eala, who simply laughed at the accusations.

"It's amusing that such an insider kind of viewpoints would come from a league outsider," said Eala. "This is probably another attempt to usurp the role of public opinion to their favor as if leave it at that. It would only make things worse if I dignified their comments with an opinion of my own."

Espinosa and Francisco appeared in yesterday's PBA Forum sponsored by Red Bull, Agfa, Color and Injury at the Manila Pavilion and said Eala should follow the rules of law regarding Tenfold.

Outside of the Tenfold case, the two did not mention other supposedly bad decisions made by Eala.

Tenfold was suspended after the parties disagreement, picking up on a broader report, cast doubts on the foreign-born expat's citizenship. When Talk N Phone/Phone Pals defeated Tenfold in the PBA Game 1 triumph, Eala forfeited the victory, a decision loathed by the board.

"Every decision I make, I have been very transparent with the board and they have, in fact, fully supported those decisions," explained Eala.

But both lawyers vowed to continue the fight for Tenfold.

"The team has found a rallying point in this," Espinosa said. "We'll fight till the end."

Talk N Text and Barangay Ginebra are presently tied 2-2 in their ongoing Giant Matador PBA Philippine Cup.

Games and Amusements Board (GAB) chair Eric Buhain said the regulatory board's legal counsel Atty. Ric Villareal also granted the weekly tourney.

Buhain, former chair of the PSC, said his office will conduct its own investigation—not on any of the many rulings made on the case but on the PBA's decision to nullify Talk N Text's Game 1 win in the Great Matador Philippine Cup finals.

"The rights of any person are within the jurisdiction of the law, so we leave the citizenship issue to the discretion of the courts," said Buhain. "We at GAB only have the jurisdiction on the contracts submitted to us. Our investigations will be fair."

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The home front

U.S. Ambassador Francis Ricciardone recently gave this advice to Filipinos: "You need to decide what kind of relationship you want to have with Iraq—how you want Iraqis to remember Filipinos and the Philippines in the future."

This came, of course, in the wake of the renewed American propaganda offensive after the elections in Iraq. The United States obviously wants to make the most of the enthusiasm for elections shown by the Iraqi people. But as Filipinos know all too well, the hard part after elections is the counting—and living with the results.

Editorial

The truth is, as impending American activities show, the axis of primary concern for the Philippines in the so-called "war on terror" is our home front. The Philippines and the United States are in the process of undertaking 20 joint military exercises this year. Twenty outclass will consist of coordinated maneuvers while the rest are to focus on anti-terror tactics and the training of light reaction units.

It is well known and well accepted that Jemaah Islamiyah either has camps of its own or has found sanctuary in the camps of rebel groups. The presence of JI trainees represents a greater threat to the country and the region.

President Macapagal-Arroyo is optimistic about the prospects of the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front concluding a peace agreement that can then help remove the basis for rebel-JI cooperation and support. "Virtually there is... peace in Mindanao," she said recently, "so writing the agreement in only ranking formal is reality." She went on to add, "In the meantime, what I can say is that our peace talks with the MILF are holding very well and our prospects for the peace process in Mindanao are very, very good."

If the President's optimism turns out to be validated by events, this will means she has to devote the country's political energies and financial resources to hunting down JI agents in the country and to ensuring major MILF or even Moro National Liberation Front elements do not develop alternative alliances with the JI. These remains, too, the continuing government on-again, off-again peace talks and then all-out war strategy in dealing with the National Democratic Front and the New People's Army.

From a combination of American pressure and the findings of their own governments, Europe has slowly been showing an inclination to viewing the CPP-NPA as a terrorist group, even as countries like Norway do what they can to facilitate talks. Whichever rank the government takes, the increasingly belligerent behavior of the CPP-NPA points to its suffering from the erosion of foreign sympathies for it. However, government strategies must inevitably include the development of poverty-stricken provinces that are breeding grounds for rebellion and insurgency.

The President has already issued Executive Order No. 404 to implement an agreement with the MDF to lay down operational guidelines for a Joint Monitoring Committee to oversee implementation of the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law. The agreement was signed by the government and the MDF in the Hague on March 16, 1998. The government-monitoring committee will closely work with the Commission on Human Rights in probing human rights violations and monitor the government's compliance with its international treaty obligations on human rights. The country has a golden opportunity to show it has nothing to hide.

Development for the provinces mired in poverty and scarred by insurgency and counter-insurgency requires billions of pesos, much political capital and tremendous energy. This leaves little room for expeditious overtures, particularly in equally insurgency-stricken nations like Iraq. If the Philippines really wants to help fight international terrorism, it already has its hands full here at home.

The home front is the primary front; our national security interests will be largely determined by how we handle home-grown or home-based threats, whether it is the JI, its allies, or the NPA and its dependencies. The considerations of local and national officials and institutions, including the military, also point to the need for the government to concentrate its efforts at home.

PR drive vs 'counterfeit' medicines confirmed

As I See It

Neal H. Cruz

Two weeks after this column dwelt on a propaganda drive against government importation of medicines to provide Filipinos with cheaper medicines ("Medicines imported by RP govt are not fake," As I See It, 2-24-05), I received a friend letter from Hong Kong, communications consultant of the Coalition Against Counterfeit Medicines, which confirmed that there really is a drive by various agencies against "counterfeit" medicines. The drive, it seemed, however, that it is against the parallel importation by the Philippine International Trading Center (PITC) headed by Secretary Roberto Pagdanganan. He said the objective is "to raise awareness on the part of the public on the dangers of the 'counterfeit' medicines (stuff) that are mixed in any way to obtain that the medicines being imported by the PITC are counterfeit. In fact, this is precisely the issue raised by the DOH (Department of Health) and DTI (Department of Trade) even before they agreed to be a part of the coalition (sic) (DOH as an initiative). Hence, the issue was thoroughly thrashed out by the coalition before it launched its campaign so as the issue would not be seen as a program against government's parallel imports."

Davies said the campaign's primary goal is "to arm the public with information against medicines that do not pass through the regulatory processes of the Bureau of Food and Drugs (BMD). It aims to educate unsuspecting Filipinos on how to detect a counterfeit from a genuine medicine, and how to report these medicines so they can report to relevant counterfeiting.

"By World Health Organization (WHO) definition, counterfeiting can apply to both brand and generic products. Thus, counterfeit medicines may include:

"1. products with the correct ingredients but fake packaging;

"2. products with the wrong ingredients;

"3. products without active ingredients;

"4. products with insufficient ingredients.

"Please understand that the coalition's efforts are not against medicines that meet regulatory requirements set by the BMD, but are against the potentially dangerous counterfeit medicines that deliberately avoid regulatory scrutiny (hides count for whatever reason. Obviously, this is the target of the coalition because they pose serious and grave danger to our countrymen's health, safety and well being."

The coalition's communications consultant concludes: "We hope this clarifies some of the points raised in your column."

No, it does not, unless we are commenting pub. Is concerned. The confusion is created by the unfortunate use by the coalition of the word "counterfeit." The WHO definition (WHO) has often been accused of being a "tool" of US big business). "counterfeit" precisely includes the parallel imports of the PITC that, as in No. 1 of the definitions describes, are "products with the correct ingredients but fake packaging." The PITC imports are genuine medicines manufactured abroad by subsidiaries of the mother multinational pharmaceutical companies (in other words, identical medicines of the multinationals here) but brought here because they are cheaper. Their packaging and labels may be different from those manufactured here. Therefore, they fall under the WHO definition of "counterfeit."

But during the 20 columns penned on, in the Philippines, "counterfeit" is confused with "fake." In fact, that is the word—"fake"—that is often used in news reports in media because it is much shorter than "counterfeit" which is too long for headline purposes. I have not read in the newspapers or heard on TV and radio any explanation from the coalition about the difference between "counterfeit" and "fake" in the case of medicines. As far as the public is concerned, which is not privy to the discussion of the coalition, "counterfeit" is the same as "fake" and that includes the cheaper government imports. Therefore, they are scared into buying only the more expensive medicines manufactured by the multinationals.

Why not use "substandard" instead of "counterfeit," as the meaning becomes clearer? The PITC imports are not substandard because they are really "genuine" and have the correct ingredients and are priced as those made here by the multinationals. But I think the multinationals like to use "counterfeit" because the PITC imports dilute its definition. I suspect that the real reason for the propaganda campaign is the fear of the multinationals that the government's parallel imports will eat up their huge market share. I think the DOH and DTI were just cajoled into to make it (registration) possible.

If the coalition is really after the welfare, health and well-being of the Filipinos, why does it not concentrate on lowering the prices of multinationals? That will make imports unnecessary.

And speaking of substandard medicines, why not inquire into the efficacy of so many "medicines" claiming to make benefits to their advertisements—packaged herbs, leaves and bark claiming to be good against diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer and a lot of other diseases, just like the snake oil of old...but which escape "regulatory scrutiny" by the BMD because they are classified as "food supplements"? I have not heard the BOH explain that there are no clear scientific proof that these "food supplements" really do what they claim to do. Instead, some doctors and even media personalities are advertising or endorsing this or that products, and they don't even get a cut of the profit.

First stone

There's the Rub

Conrado de Quiros

doesn't support it both on its values-confusion and its bigotry, indeed Christianity.

The Church is easily the biggest involvement in this country and continues to grow so. Though appreciably with the application of less duress now than then, even if the impact among women is evident and immense. I know of a group of Catholics who built a church in their parish, the Sto. Niño, somewhere in the outskirts of Quezon City and who found no end of beseeching from the parish priest of the area for them to donate the property to the Church, the latter for them presumably to be looked upon with favor by God.

During Spanish times, the friars acquired much land by threatening landowners or their deathbeds, not often subtly with hellfire in the afterlife if they did not make up for their sins by lavish tokens of charity to God's representatives on earth. The landowners, who had to live lives of quiet desperation, who had to live with their up to Satan's demonic splendors that a great sinner always underlay a great wealth, and being generally spiritual wreaths along, side being physical bellies, were not always loath to buy off God with part of their loot. In this sweeping and grabbing of souls of their prospective heirs who still had a while to go before they got into that state.

Accounts and diaries complained that Church officials slept with the enemy, at least those at home whose mother tongue were also generous enough to...applies as much today as it did in the past. The subversive perception was patent in some Cardinal Sin's fulminations against friar-ups—and remonstrations with the Protestant, and, worse, rightfisted, Iglesia—on one hand, and tolerance of Cory and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo even in the face of wholesale pillage on the other.

It wasn't Gloria's upbraiding Cory for replacing Marcos' cronies with her own, it was a smorgasbord for the market shares. I think the BOH and DTI were just cajoled into to make it (registration) possible.

If the coalition is really after the welfare, health and well-being of the Filipinos, why does it not concentrate on lowering the prices of multinationals? That will make imports unnecessary.

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And it wasn't Sin who applauded GMA for banning people's money like a drunken sailor in campaign. He endorsed her. In fact, saying she was the messiah-born. Personage was deep she was the messiah-born. Personage was deep she was the messiah-born. Personage was deep

Not safe anywhere

ANALYSIS

Amando Doronila

At far as I can remember, the threat made by Malacañang president of the Council for Overseas Filipinos and Humanitas, to jailed reporter Luis Beltran of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, for her report on the alleged illegal logging activities of Rimas' company, is the first direct assault by a prince individual on press freedom in the metropolitan Manila area. As such, the threat has a chilling implication for journalists operating in the metropolis.

Rimas Bautista, especially those on the staff of the fearless newspaper exposing the drug Dynasties networks, have to be complacent in the belief that because Manila is the media center of the nation, news journalists inside the metropolis enjoy a special immunity from harassment and violence. They have come to believe that their personal territories are most vulnerable to violent reprisals, as borne out by the fact that most of the Mindanao journalists who have been killed since 1986 were community journalists.

Beltran, who is out on bail, and the staff of the fearless newspaper exposing the drug Dynasties networks, have to be complacent in the belief that because Manila is the media center of the nation, news journalists inside the metropolis enjoy a special immunity from harassment and violence. They have come to believe that their personal territories are most vulnerable to violent reprisals, as borne out by the fact that most of the Mindanao journalists who have been killed since 1986 were community journalists.

Beltran, who is out on bail, published by bonding metropolitan dailies, which carried the stories, was arrested on illegal logging—an issue that has been at the center of public concern, following the disastrous mudslides in the wake of the typhoon southeast of metro Manila.

Sheila Coronel, executive director of the PCIJ, has taken the threats on her staff as dangerous acts which cannot be taken lying down without encouraging further violence. Rimas has denied the charges of illegal logging in Bataan, describing the employees' exchange between him and Beltran. According to Coronel's letter, those allegedly present Bautista and told her, "You know, if you were not a woman, you would do a lot of things to me." Coronel then said that Rimas, a lawyer, had allegedly denied that he had done unsolicited things to women in the past and had the capacity to do it again.

Since Coronel has gone on record protesting against Rimas' actions, he can dispute her allegations or even raise legal actions against her, only Coronel and the PCIJ can also against Beltran for his offending report.

Rimas, of course, has his own side of the logging story. He told Beltran in the phone call, "You illegal ka, why? We just found it. PROOF I am not an illegal logger."

Bautista's story did publish Rimas' side. "I am not a logger; I am just cleaning my land," he was quoted as saying at the end of the article.

Bautista has informed DOJ Director General Hilarion Aglipay of the incident.

"You see, we cannot take such threats lightly, considering that 39 journalists were killed in the Philippines during the past decade," Coronel said in a letter to Aglipay. "As a lawyer, you know very well that making grave threats against anyone is a legal offense."

It's not clear whether the Philippine National Police will take another measure to protect journalists from harassment. Since 1986, no police force has prepared on the cases of 90 slain journalists. The police have been trying to decentralize whether the murders on the journalists were related to their work, since in most cases, the line between official and non-official activities is blurred.

From experience, the press cannot be confident in the protection of Philippine law enforcement, which does not serve as an effective deterrent to violence. The press is better off serving notice that it would stand for abuse from either private individuals or government officials.

Only recently, the international media group, Reporters Without Borders, expressed shock at the killing of Edgar Damo, a key witness in the murder of his friend, broadcaster Edgar Damalerio. Another was shot dead in Pagadian City on Feb. 2. Covered by the justice department's witness protection program, Antero was the second witness to be killed by accomplices of the alleged chief gunman in the killing of Damalerio, co-anchor of Gov't. Watch on Aksyon.

Reporters Without Borders expressed dismay over the government's inability to protect witnesses in a trial that Presidential Management Secretary Ignacio Bunye has indicated is of interest in the fight against violence in journalism.

The threats in Bautista followed the banning on Jan. 11 of an ABS-CBN unit in Mindanao, "in a group called 'Group X' which claimed its members were supporters of the then presidential candidate Fernando Poe Jr. The group accused ABS-CBN of "suppressing the truth" in its coverage of the May election. Former President Joseph Estrada's camp has also complained that the attack should serve as a warning to media organizations allegedly engaged in biased reporting.

The administration's condemnation of the burning of the van as an attack on press freedom, was in itself denied by the group PNP Spokesman Reuben Sindac. It is ironic before the Manila Overseas Press Club, the President said, "I stated before you camp's deeply committed to preserving the health, life and safety of every journalist who plies his trade here in the country, dead or alive, and yet, until I will not rest until those assassins are brought to justice. You have my word."

It could be a lot of things to me," Coronel then said. One thing, however, fairly allegedly denied that he had done unsolicited things to women in the past and had the capacity to do it again.

Since Coronel has gone on record protesting against Rimas' actions, he can dispute her allegations or even raise legal actions against him, only Coronel and the PCIJ can also against Beltran for his offending report

The coconut gold mine

THIS is in reaction to the news item, "Coco producers wage war vs American soybean groups" (PDI, 1/27/05). This war is long overdue—for decades, as a matter of fact. We in the Concerned Women of the Philippines, an organization headed by the farm owner of the American Soybean Association (ASA), which is again on a vicious campaign to "classify coconut oil under the category of saturated fat from animals" (should it rise to prominence), as it did in the '80s when a falsely portrayed coconut oil as a "health danger and causes heart disease."

The truth must be told. Among the coconut oil's many health, nutrition and healing benefits: hypertensive heart disease, high blood pressure; helps lower cholesterol; protects body from breast, colon and other cancers; protects body from ulcers, lung infections, herpes and other diseases; helps eliminate gall bladder and kidney stones, helps prevent and control diabetes; helps prevent bacterial, fungal and viral infections, helps stimulate metabolism; promotes weight loss, controls allergies (asthma, rhinitis, etc.); protects against osteoporosis. There are more, including beauty benefits, but then we just too many to mention. Then may seem incredible, but they are based on published researches, scientific studies, historical records and personal experiences.

Dr. Bruce Fife, a naturopathic doctor and the author of the book "The Healing Miracles of Coconut Oil," states that "we lost the many health benefits that we once got from regular consumption of coconut products. Through the cunning marketing strategy of said group, the misguided efforts of public interest groups, we have replaced a good health-promoting fat with a very destructive and harmful one." More information can be downloaded from the Internet, www.bi.com and how studies by Dr. Mary Enig, nutritionist and one of the world's leading authorities on fats and oils; Dr. Jon Kabara, Dr. Conrado Dayrit and Dr. R.D. Cabeja, among others.

Dr. Fife also says that coconut oil is the "healthiest oil on earth and is even superior to olive oil." And "Philippine coconuts are considered the best in the world."

Coconut oil can be the Philippines' gold mine if only the government would give its full support. Dr. Dayrit, on a TV interview recently, lamented the fact that so many Filipinos have not been able to take advantage of the many benefits that can be derived from the regular consumption of coconut oil.

The whole country should rally behind this war against the ASA's misrepresentation. We owe it to our people, especially our local economic producers who have been "taking the beating" because of bum information.

Let us support the Philippine coconut industry and start taking this "liquid vitamin" in support of "good health in the 21st century." Truly, the "miracle food" from the "tree of life," fptitud this good news!

—ELIZABETH LORENZANA-HAU,
chair, Concerned Women of the Philippines,
Kalipunan Avenue,
Loyola Heights, Quezon City

LETTERS

No protégé of GMA's adviser

THIS concerns the news item entitled "Estrategic identifies JDV's 'Top guns, illegal loggers'" (PDI, 2/1/05). The story inaccurately identifies Estrategic's list of alleged illegal loggers, as "a protégé of a former secretary for special concerns in the Arroyo administration."

To avoid possible confusion among those who know me as a former presidential adviser on special economic concerns under the Arroyo administration, I would like to put on record that I do not consider myself a protégé of any Boy Mo before, during or after my stint as presidential adviser on special concerns.

—HERMENEGILDO R. GONZALES,
presidential chief of staff,
Office of the President,
Malacañang, Manila

Reinstatement an SC order

THE DEPARTMENT of Education would like to respond to the report "DepEd reinstates sex harassers, slams career, then restores appointments." (PDI, 1/31/05)

The DepEd ordered the reinstatement of Alberto Bolagtit in strict compliance with the Dec. 10, 2004 ruling of the Supreme Court, which restored him of several benefits but tightened his powers from dismissal. The previous decision of the DepEd in 1999 to sanction misconduct is without merit.

The DepEd is ready to recall Bolagtit's reinstatement if as announced or advised by the Supreme Court, which is the final arbiter on the matter.

—FLORENCIO B. ABAD,
secretary,
Department of Education,
DepEd Complex,
Meralco Avenue, Pasig City

ERC clarifies on CNP interconnection

THE ENERGY Regulatory Commission would like to make a clarification with respect to the news article titled "Negros Power joins tech rebound." (PDI, 1/18/05) The reporter quoted an unidentified National Transmission Corp. (Transco) official as saying that ERC consultants recommended a three-year delay for the Negros Panay components of the Cebu-Negros-Panay (CNP) interconnection project. The ERC never authorized any consultancy group to make such a recommendation or to discuss it with anyone outside the confines of its office.

However, the ERC does see deep clout it issued a Show Cause Order, dated Aug. 9, 2004, directing Transco to submit an explanation regarding the commencement of the projects without the approval required under the Electric Power Industry Reform Act (Epira).

—ROMULO S. AGUAS JR.,
chair and chief executive officer,
Energy Regulatory Commission,
Pacific Center Bldg., San Miguel Avenue,
Pasig City

While I respect ERC Chair Rodolfo Aguas Jr., I'm sending by my source, who has been one of the most valuable all these months that I've been in the energy beat. I asked him again about his assertion and he could or it. He has acknowledged the issuance of the show cause order.

—ABIGAIL L. ING,
PDI reporter

Correcting PCIJ

THIS refers to the news article "Thin developer hunts money and cuts court" written by Cai Ordosa of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ), which was published in the Feb. 2 issue of the Inquirer.

Ordosa in her article, wrote that the Madrigal family built its fortunes on logging. The said statement is inaccurate, baseless and unfair. Our family has not been involved in logging since the 1960s, and our logging concession was in Surigao; it was turned in a concession to then President Quezon who requested my grandfather to help the national economy in the 1930s. My late father never involved in logging in any other province. Furthermore, we disengaged from the logging industry in the 1960s before the onset of the previously rampant and widespread logging activities of the 1970s and 1980s, the effects of which are being felt today.

For the record, our family's fortune was built on coal, shipping and real estate and not on logging as directly stated in the article. We were never involved in any questionable businesses.

We trust that the said statements will be appropriately rectified in the interest of the truth. Undue statements, imparting dishonor and prejudicing our family's name, were the reason why we have filed a libel case against the columnist concerned.

—SEN. JAIME N. LORETA.

Ego trip

REGARDING the column of former Ateneo regent S. Cruz, "Titles for self-esteem," (PDI, 1/25/05) reminds me of an incident in a meeting I attended some years back. Addressed in the usual manner of "Mister," a lawyer who was present stood up and corrected me by saying that he should be addressed as "Attorney." I asked the man beside me if there was anything wrong in addressing a professional "Mister." He replied that, perhaps, the lawyer spent a lot to earn that title.

Years later, I observed that while senators avoid prefixing their names with "Honorable," barangay captains are ignoring the trend on their names. The barangay kapitans have followed suit, attaching the word to their names even on documents and in publications. I could hardly believe that a friend of mine, who is a law graduate, wanted to be addressed as "Attorney" even though he could hardly speak correct English.

On the other hand, a CPA lawyer is not humble that he signs documents and financial statements written using "Atty(ty)" before his name or "CPA" after it.

—GEORGE(GE) G. PETES I SR.,
JP Head Jones,
Barangay Concepcion,
Marikina, Concerned Voter

Across the NATION

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Lapid son snubs House quarry probe

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—Gov. Mark Lapid said he would not appear in today's congressional hearing on sand operations in Pampanga. He told the inquirer he had to honor previous commitments.

Provincial Administrator Vidal Nicolas, in a separate interview, said he was representing the governor in the hearing, the first on the issue by the House committee on natural resources.

Nicolas said Agusan del Norte Rep. Lourdes Tiñga, the committee chair, allowed Lapid to send his representative.

Bataan also invited Vice Gov. Jocelino Eleazo and Subigan-ding Pantalangan councilor.

Pampanga Representatives Fausto Bagumbayan, Juan Miguel Arroyo and Aurea York Bondoc were also asked to attend, according to Pampanga Rep. Reynaldo Aquino aide Vlad Kondracke III.

The resolution sought an inquiry into the "income-generating prospects of the Pampanga quarry industry."

It was filed in November or more than two months before retired Lt. Gen. Victor Corpus, chair of the state-owned National Resources Development Corp., ordered the provincial board last Jan. 17 to make his agency the capital's collecting arm of revenues from Mt. Pinatubo's sand and raw stone of it for the national government's reforestation program.

The proposal of Corpus as well as earlier requests by Ermita to extend the moratorium over illegal collection irregularities in the former governor and now Sen. Manuel "Lito" Lapid from 1998 to June 2004.

Governor Lapid, 20, took over the quarry and sand fees in July last year.

The NSDC, which took over the quarry industry on the strength of Proclamation No. 66 of ousted President Joseph Estrada, penned P7.02.2 million in 2000, P5.32 million in 2000 and P9.06.8 million in 2001.

The treasurer's office reported P20.8 million in 2002, P18.3 million in 2003 and P19.5 million in 2004.

The agencies collected P300 for every truckload of sand hauled out of Pampanga.

The discrepancy amounted to at least P327.4 million as of last year, Ermita said, citing data from official documents.

Ermita said the Lapids should explain to the committee the amount of the "political drag" in collections.

In a privilege speech on Jan. 24, Ermita called the alleged corruption by the Lapids as running to the "magnitude of pyramids."

Senator Lapid said those were unwarranted income while his son called them "imaginary figures."

Bataan enacted the ordinance in collections in the decline in the construction industry's demand for sand.

In an earlier interview, Senator Lapid said he did "not want to dignify the inquiries (by Ermita)."

Peachie Ongsia, PDI Central Luzon Bureau

HAP
A man finds time to relax at a rest in the Centennial Park in Davao City a good place to rest as a city worker passes plenty nearby.

Illegal land titles found in public forests

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—Several illegal land titling cases inside public forest land have discovered as personnel of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources marked the forest boundaries of Bataan, Zambales, Tarlac and Nueva Ecija, the boundary hatched.

Ricardo Calderon, DENR forestry chief in Central Luzon, said all the cases were being verified and investigated. Some cases involve illegal subdivisions, especially in Bataan, he said.

Calderon said they were studying the possible involvement of local DENR officials in those cases. Unapproved land classification surveys were used in obtaining areas to be titled as private lands, he said.

So far, the DENR has installed at least 1,500 concrete markers along 2,000 km of forest lands in Nueva Ecija and Bataan, which straddle the Sierra Madre mountain range east of Central Luzon, and Zambales on the west of the region.

There were to be five of 11 provinces prioritized for the delimitation program, a "delineate-Korea Boost" then Calderon likened to the Great Wall of China.

The program seeks to define at least 3,000 km of forest land to the three provinces and to improve and the neighboring provinces of Bulacan, Pampanga and Tarlac until 2008, according to DENR Regional Executive Director Baptista de Leon, in response to questions by Secretary Michael Defensor.

The delineation, De Leon said, was "part of government's strategy" to manage the country's remaining forests, which stood at only seven million hectares.

In 2001 and the program, which costs P44 million, started in the region in 2000 and was undertaken by the land-evaluation party of the forest management division.

Ilying the Philippine reference are 500 that employed satellite images. Forestry personnel defined the boundaries by installing concrete markers at an interval of 1 km each.

Geographical coordinates are written on the markers, which are 7 feet tall. In between, at least 4,500 smaller markers were put up at a 200-meter interval each.

De Leon told Defensor that the absence of definite boundaries have opened the forests to squatting, kaingin and illegal logging.

According to Calderon, more than half of 968,108 hectares of forest in Central Luzon had been denuded since 2000 without forest-survey report.

"Once we have clearly marked our forests, the government can now channel its resources to forest protection and conservation," he said in a separate statement. Tonette Orejas, PDI Central Luzon Bureau

Customs post proves too juicy for execs

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Diggings pit treasure hunter vs villagers in Capiz barangay

By Felipe R. Cobino
PDI Visayas Bureau

ROXAS CITY—A treasure hunter has been accused of putting in danger the lives of residents of a village after he started excavating a tomb in Sitio Apalengo, Barangay Dalanguin in Pilar, Capiz.

Barbara Sison, Dalanguin village chief, said the excavation, which has reached 20-feet deep, posed grave danger to residents should water from the mountain flow to the excavation area.

Pilar, a former mayor of Pilar town, said he has already reported the excavation being undertaken by Andres Lorenzo, who had identified himself as district coordinator of the Treasure Hunters Associations of the Philippines Inc. (THAPI).

A heated confrontation ensued between Dalanguin barangay officials and Lorenzo on Monday at the excavation site and only the presence of policemen from the 3rd Police Mobile Group prevented a bloody confrontation.

The excavation activities had permission from landowner Rafael Santos II, Lorenzo told reporters here while more persons during the confrontation on Monday.

Lorenzo claimed there was no need to secure permits from the officials of Dalanguin and Pilar because he had already permits from the landowners. He, however, admitted that he has not obtained any Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

Lorenzo showed to barangay officials and reporters a map and a piece of document from Japan that supposedly proved that the excavation had hidden treasures left by the Japanese.

He claimed that the Japanese Imperial Army used the area as a camp during World War II. He would not say what kind of treasures were supposed to be hidden in the area.

Erosion alert up in South Cotabato

KORONADAL CITY—Environment officials here have sounded the alarm on massive soil erosion near four more towns of South Cotabato.

Geronimo Sequito, community environment and natural resources officer, said they were closely monitoring the towns of Tampakan, Banga, Polomolok, Tboli, Surallah, Tupi, and Lake Sebu. He said these towns need to be rehabilitated immediately to protect forest cover and wildlife.

The towns, he said, are among the 10 towns in Central Mindanao identified by the Regional Physical Framework Plan for 2004-2020 of the Regional Development Council as prone to soil erosion.

Sequito said rehabilitation and reforestation plans are continuously to prevent erosion after South Cotabato Gov. Jesus Arnulco Pacquiao, who also heads the development council, issued an executive order urging local chief executives of the seven towns to act on the problem.

A National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) report showed that half of the towns in Central Mindanao are experiencing moderate to severe soil erosion. This, the Neda report said, could shorten the economic growth of the region.

Soil erosion is caused by lack of trees.

In Sarangani, at least six of the seven towns are also considered erosion-prone. These are the capital town of Malapi, Maasim, Kiamba, Maitingcon, Malapatan and Glan.

At least eight towns in Sultan Kudarat are also prone to soil erosion. These are the towns of Isulan, Lambayong, Lebak, Bagumbayan, Columbio, Esperanza, Kalamansig and Senator Ninoy Aquino.

Sequito said community reforestation and rehabilitation programs in the 10 towns and a city of South Cotabato are being implemented by local government units.

He also stressed that the implementation of a road log ban in the remaining virgin forests of Central Mindanao until 2006 can also help stop the erosion.

Jeffrey Tupas, PDI Mindanao Bureau

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REX C. DRILON II
Chief Operating Officer

Jobless youth told: Try medical transcription

By Alec Pal
PNI Visayas Bureau

SUMAGUETE CITY—A former senator and labor leader advised millions of jobless college graduates to try their luck at medical transcription, which, he said, is emerging as the biggest market for jobs in the country.

Ernesto Herrera, former senator and head of the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines, said "there is a huge business opportunity for medical transcription in the Philippines."

"We have a golden opportunity to provide stable, well-paying jobs to millions of unemployed Filipinos and they don't even have to leave the country," he said in a press statement.

Herrera gave this piece of advice in an entrepreneur in Dumaguete City took the lead in opening a medical transcription company.

Victor Vicente Ilaco, a retired Finnish-based architect, opened the Forbesco Information Technology Inc. after learning about the high-speed fiber optic network in Negros Oriental, which is ideal for IT-based industries.

The opening of Forbesco Information Technology Inc. is seen as a big boost to efforts of the provincial government to position Negros Oriental as an investment center for IT industries.

Forbesco is now training students in the medical field and graduates who could work for the global market starting April.

"This is a good opportunity for us to generate jobs for people in the nursing and allied medical field as they wait for about two years to get jobs abroad," Ilaco said.

In his statement, Herrera said a medical transcriptionist is someone who transforms medical reports dictated by medical professionals into written format, which could then be printed as hard copy or stored in computer system.

Trainees ... for instance, type patient information on Dictaphone which are then transcribed for documentation. Their records are used for purposes of auditor reimburse or for serving as legal proof of medical advice," said the statement.

He quoted the Center for International Trade Expositions and Missions (Users) of the Department of Trade and Industry as saying the cross-border American medical transcription market alone is worth at least $20 billion, with some $5 billion of that market being made available to the Philippines and India.

Ilaco said his firm, Forbesco, will do medical transcription for some US hospitals. This week, they are training a batch of applicants who are graduates in biology, physical therapy, nursing and medical technology.

Ilaco has also placed recruitment ads in Cebu newspapers. Preferred applicants are graduates or graduates of nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, biology, medical technology, and allied medical courses who have a working knowledge of medical terms.

Bob Cruz, Forbesco manager and training officer, said they are seeking to improve the learning skills of all prospective regular employees.

The main job of these medical transcribers is to convert doctors' taped audio reports or digitized audio downloads and sound files into written data.

Other parts of the training include understanding foreign accents and colloquialisms, encoding speeds—the required 400 lines of text per hour, accuracy of the transcription, and the use of specific medical transcription software when submitting electronic files to companies abroad.

Ilaco said he hopes to start with 50 users and maybe expand as the volume of work increases.

There are more than 50 medical transcription companies in Manila, and two in Cebu City. "But the job load from abroad is just immense, the industry cannot cope with the demand," said Ilaco.

The P7 million high investment venture in medical transcription normally gets its return of investment in about 18 months.

"Medical transcription in the Philippines is a high-pressure kind of business where people who cannot be good enough especially ones who're dealing with a global market," Ilaco said.

Cops kill 4 car theft suspects in Pampanga

SAN SIMON, Pampanga— Four suspected car thieves were killed in a gunfight with Traffic Management Group agents here early yesterday, police said.

Police said the four TMG agents are the subjects in Meyenanyan, Bulacan.

When TMG agents tagged it down in Barangay Sta. Monica in San Simon at about 10:40 a.m., the suspects put up a fight, police said.

Investigators found two Cadillac cars and two .38 cal. revolvers inside the vehicle.

Supt. Eleuterio Gutierrez, Central Luzon TMG chief said the identities of the suspects, who were in their 30s and 40s, were still being checked. The bodies were taken to the Luzon Funeral Parlor in the City of San Fernando.

But a resident in Barangay Sta. Monica told the reporter that the suspects did not put up a fight. The source also said the shots, which occurred behind a closed bedding plant in the same village, happened at about 1:15 p.m., not in the morning, as the police claimed.

In Bulacan, the members of a gasoline boy gang operating in Bulacan and Nueva Ecija at were arrested by members of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Team and the Bulacan police during a raid in the Meycauayan on Sunday.

Chief Insp. Rolando Bañas, CIDT chief, identified the suspects as Jhun Legaspi, 42, the suspected leader of the gang; Alvin Legaspi, 21, Roberto de la Cruz, 43; Lemuel Chaves, 39; and Edgardo Carreon, 24.

The police seized two .38 Armscor revolver, a .45 cal. pistol, a shotgun, a .22 cal. rifle and bullets. Rosario Devlyn with a report from Carmelo Reyes, Central Luzon Desk

ENDANGERED
Morning (Humphead Wrasse), a kind of fish favored in many restaurants, was recently listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites) as an endangered species. The catching and trading of this fish is now banned and carries a penalty of imprisonment and P 120,000 in fine. Morning is sold for as much as $100 per kilogram in Hong Kong and more. PNI photo.

Senate body to probe PNP recruitment scam

COMMEX CITY—A town mayor's complaint has prompted the Senate to investigate reports that recruitment are being made to pay to secure them of admission in the police force.

The chair of the Senate police and public order committee said his committee has received complaints similar to that raised by Mayor Teodoro Olivarez of Talisay Bulacan, Ma. guindanao.

Mamora complained that the men he recommended for admission into the police force were made to pay at least P150,000 each to ensure their enlistment.

Sta. Manuel Villar said mayors of Kalibo, Aklan have aired the same complaint.

"That's why my committee wants it investigated to find out the truth and the extent of the alleged anomaly in the PNP recruitment system," he said.

But hearings on the 2005 national budget delayed the investigation, he added.

He said the committee has summoned Director General Hilario Ediñon, Philippine National Police (PNP) Senior Supt. Bukarin Bilala, PNP ASMM police chief, and National Police Commission (Napolcom) officials.

Mamora complained particularly of Mamerto Amadeo, ASMM Napolcom director, whom the mayor accused of narrating to police recruits who failed to turn for paid the fees.

The mayor said he was ready to present applicants who would testify that they were victims of the recruitment scam.

Villar said he would also require the Napolcom to submit an investigation report on Mamora's complaint.

Amadeo, reprised vice chair of the Napolcom's police screening and promotion board, separately denied Mamora's allegations, saying he was willing to be investigated.

Mamora said the case should be brought to court "to end once and for all this irregularity in the police force." Charlie Jordano, PNI Mindanao Bureau

Gunmen kill Batangas cop

CAMP VICENTE LIM, Laguna— Two unidentified gunmen shot and killed a Batangas policeman and wounded the victim's five-year-old niece in an ambush in Barangay San Sebastian, Lipa City yesterday morning.

Director Oscar Calderon, Calabarzon police director, identified the victim as SPO1 Romulo Bañiles, a member of the Lipa City police office.

He said the victim was driving his jeep with his niece, Patricia Aquino, at around 8 a.m. when the suspects appeared. Sen. Bañiles

INQUIRER Northern Luzon
Edna Jun Rentuayal
Bureau Chief Rolando B. Fernandez

Artists pollinate flower festival

By Frank Cimatu
Baguio City

FILMMAKER Kidlat Tahimik is the first to admit that he knows little about the Panagbenga or the Baguio flower festival is in full bloom.

But one, there are too many people. Second, the festival has been too commercial, drawn to the dramas of stalls selling hot dogs. And third, Baguio artists like Kidlat have nothing to do with Panagbenga despite their strong presence.

This year, however, Kidlat is stuck with the event.

Sweet karma struck Kidlat when Mayor Braulio Yaranon decided that the annual flower festival should be run by private entities and designated the filmmaker as its co-chair. When he co-chair quit, Kidlat was the last man standing. Joining him in the fiercely independent-minded Salka Dil, who acts as treasurer.

That is why these days, Kidlat's favorite curse is lightening and thunder will not be back. He has become the lightening rod.

He also asked people to stop calling his "classical" an culture "cultural" of the festival events.

When asked for a motto, he decided on "Bahh Bulahhh," which is simplistic enough but given the successes of the past Panagbenga co-officials, the emphasis was more on logistics than on flowers.

The committee members decided that the festival should be community-driven and community-centered. Activities have been dispersed to different parts of the city other than Burnham Park. The Pony Boys' Day on March 6 has been set at Wright Park, for example.

Session Road has been declared commercial billboard-free zone.

"Let us not make the city the Billyads of giant Japanese Cybercommunication companies," Tahimik said.

Streamer war

He cited the festivals in Boracay where even the ads of banzai hot the familiar television brands all over the country for their tastes, had been the battleground of those companies, prompting Baguio students and sympathizers during last year's Panagbenga to start an online petition against the billboard and streamer wars.

Instead of the "20,000 telephone-booth size streets," as Tahimik describes them, this year will be transformed into the "tiniest jam" of the festival.

The road will be closed from Feb. 28 to March 6, and during this period, huge flower-shaped tents will shield street cafés that will carry themes based on music genre, such as rock, jazz and classical.

Juxtaposed Kidlat cycle: the event is known as "Fls. E.I.S.T.—Linked Int" or "The Flowers 'F' is Stones"—Toys Linked Na. "The "market encounter" has been renamed "FE" or "Flowers Expression" and it will be held at the city coliseum.

ARTIST IN Equitte prepares one of the "mornings masks" for the Baguio flower festival. The masks are meant to exercise the deadly morningsickness toxins that affected the city recently.

Nearby fourteen floral benches designed as "street itself" and will be closed during the entire period. The giant telecom firms will stage their sponsored concerts in different venues. Local bands will have the chance to strut their stuff during the "Bahhhh Bash" and "Bigang at Onbeg."

Theater artist Lynette Carantes-Bihol has been named co-producer of the Children's Week. (See story below).

Last year, the street dancing parade was rained out and yet the schoolchildren were so with their teachers, causing some parents to storm City Hall.

No parading children

To avoid a similar embarrassing the festival's executive committee decided to bar elementary school children from joining the parade on Feb. 26. Only high school and college students will be marching.

Instead, "Batel Bahhhh" has been scheduled for Feb. 26-March 2 at the Northern Dalt. Art and storytelling workshops will be held for the young, including street children and school dropouts.

Another chance prize, Bride John Bulaong, has organized On Pink Festival on March 5 at Bandstand. Dapay to give Panagbenga a Cordillera flavor, highlights will be the many tribal weave farming and weaving contests.

The 700 gongs (to signify number) will be replaced by schoolchildren in t-string and gongas (Cordillera gongs) dancing to one beat.

Mask maker Di Equitte will have his clever group, Tropang Bahhh, dancing on the streets, wearing "mornings masks" to exercise the deadly morningsickness toxins that besieged the city recently.

Local artists, like Kinnaton de Guia, Leonard Aguinaldo, Norman Adefuin and Arnel Dimaculangan, have designed posters and T-shirts.

Finally, after 10 years, Panagbenga has been taken over by the artists.

This time, children take center stage

CHILDREN and flowers give Baguio City something to smile and be proud about.

Last year, schoolchildren participating in the street dancing parade made the Baguio flower festival shine, though the rains drenched parade participants and spectators.

This year's organizers, however, made sure that the children would be present, and beat uncooperative weather by withdrawing their participation in the street dancing parade. Instead, they set aside a special program for them under the theme "Charm to the Children."

Lynette Carantes-Bihol, head of the children's committee, said she wanted to nurture children's minds and skills at such an early age as this.

The program would show the children how important they were to the festival, now on its 100-year, she said. "We want to let [the children] know that Panagbenga is not only for the government, or for the business or social sectors, or for a few individuals. It is also a celebration for them and the celebration of our hopes is theirs," she said.

She said the street dancing parade encouraged the competitive spirit rather than stimulate the creative process among children.

From Feb. 28 to March 2, the children will be treated to various workshops and creative activities at the Melvin Jones in Bacalaso Park.

Bihol said on Feb. 28, workshop on performance art, visual art, installation art, and ethnic or indigenous music will be held under the guidance of local artists.

On March 1, program that will involve the children and their families will be held. Among these are storytelling, painting, poetry-writing and flower arrangement.

On that day the children will be asked to help local artists in creating a giant flesh mandala or mosaic at the Melvin Jones grandstand. The children will recycle the flowers used by street dancers and parade floats for the mandala.

On March 2, the drum and lyre bands competition and field demonstrations and dance contests will be held. To cap the activities, the children will release lighted paper balloons. Drama fireworks

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AIR ATTACK: A helicopter takes off from the Jolo airport Tuesday on a combat mission against Moro rebels as fighting rages for a second day. —

17 soldiers, 30 Misuari followers killed in Sulu

Front page 2 ▸

ple with a bomb on a passenger ferry in February 2004.

The clashes occurred while the government was preparing to resume peace negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the biggest separatist group now operating in Mindanao.

The peace talks, being brokered by Malaysia, are to resume some time this month in Kuala Lumpur.

Expecting more clashes, the Philippine National Police yesterday placed the entire Western Mindanao Command on heightened alert.

Police also restored government facilities and other vital installations.

"We will see to it that there will be no resurgence of violence spilling over to Zamboanga City in the form of bombing and attacks similar to April and March or any other possible diversionary tactic," said Director Eldrie Quarrel, Western Mindanao Command chief.

Up to 500 Marines sailed from Zamboanga City to reinforce troops on Jolo.

They were to reinforce about 3,000 soldiers battling hundreds of gunmen from the Abu Sayyaf, a small group linked to al-Qaida, and renegade MILF members.

Death of civilians

The fighting erupted on Monday when Misuari's followers attacked Army posts in Basilan.

The attack was triggered by the death of three civilians, including 14-year-old Hakeel Hadwasi, on Feb. 1 during clashes between government forces and the Abu Sayyaf bandits, two ranking military officials said.

"The known truth here is that the [death of the three civilians] have been buried (by Misuari's breakaway group)," said Brig. Gen. Nelson Allaga, acting commander of the Marine forces South.

Brig. Gen. Ireneo Habacon, chief of the Army's 1st Infantry Division, said that the death of the civilians had worsened the anger of the MILF members under Umarik Hataman Hadji.

Motive behind attacks

Reagonia said the attackers belonging to the so-called Misuari Breakaway Group (MBG) might have other motives.

"We have information that the supporters of former chief Nur Misuari resented the transfer of his detention to Sulu," Reagonia said in a radio interview. "They are trying to pressure the government to give us (back detainees)."

Misuari, facing rebellion charges,

MISUARI

is being held in a police camp in Sta. Rosa, Laguna.

The clashes broke out in Panamao and in Barangay Parang in Patikul town, and other areas.

Tensions still high

A barangay councilor of Sitio was wounded during the fighting.

"It's unfortunate that the [Feb. 1] operation in Menzi foreseen against the Abu Sayyaf under Dokiya Abu hit some MBC in the process," Reagonia said.

As of press time, tensions were still high in the affected areas as the MNLF members had yet to withdraw.

"We cannot pinpoint yet the exact effect (but)," Allaga said.

At least 14 soldiers have been wounded in the clashes.

Hospital mistaken

In Monday's fighting, about 300 of Misuari's followers either encircled or occupied an Army company detachment in Panamao's 6th village and entered a nearby hospital, which has since been retaken by Army troops, military officials said.

The six-day tangle began last incurred by the military. 19 Marines were killed and 14 others were wounded in an ambush of a military reinforcement contingent on Monday in Patikul, near Panamao, the military said.

The military vowed to go all-out against the attackers.

"The AFP and MNLF are terrorists and the [military] troopers, Muslims and Christians, will ensure there and justice is served," Lt. Col. Buenaventura Mamaril, military information officer, told reporters. *Reports from Erlie S. Alipala, PDI Mindanao Bureau; Christine Y. Esguerra in Manila; AP and Reuters*

Scrap peace talks, Abu spokesman urges MILF

By Christian Esguerra

ABU SAYYAF's self-proclaimed spokesperson, Abu Solaiman, yesterday urged the Moro Islamic Liberation Front to abandon its peace negotiations with the government.

"To our brothers in the MILF, don't waste our nation's honor, dignity and right even in exchange for the whole world," Solaiman said in a morning radio interview.

Peace talks in KL

The government and the MILF are to resume off-and-on peace negotiations in Kuala Lumpur this month.

"No amount of development can pay for our homeland's dignity and national integration or sovereignty," Solaiman said from an undisclosed place.

Instead of pursuing a peace agreement, the MILF should join forces with Misuari's Moro National Liberation Front in fighting the "enemies of Islam," he said.

'Victory or martyrdom'

"Continue the struggle until we attain either of the two, victory or martyrdom," Solaiman said, addressing the ASG, Misuari Breakaway Group and MILF fighters.

Solaiman added: "Our latest series of offensive military actions against the enemies of Islam in Sulu, together with some remnants of the MNLF is our response to the government's treacherous ways of dealing with our MILF brothers in Central Mindanao, just like what they have done to the MNLF before."

The fighting on Jolo has been the most intense in recent months and reflected the fragility of peace in the whole country in the Philippines.

Specially ill-trained military offensives in recent years have wrested down the strength of the al-Qaida linked Abu Sayyaf, leaving their targets on the run on Jolo and nearby provinces.

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CEBU PACIFIC

Catholic Chinoys can still toast the New Year

Front page A2 ▸

that comes with the start of the 40-day Lenten season, which starts today.

The Hong Kong model

CBCP secretary general Msgr. Hermando Coronel said the bishops were free to give dispensations, or exemptions, from fasting and abstinence restrictions.

Coronel cited the case of Hong Kong, where the Catholic Chinese decided to fast and abstain on another day because they wanted to enjoy their New Year to the hilt.

Coronel said bishops had the discretion to grant a dispensation from practices that are according to Church discipline but not from laws that are from God, such as the 10 Commandments.

Substitute charity work

"The CBCP has Chinese-Filipino speechmakers all over the Philippines... In the Philippines, we can dispense these [fasting], but they have to substitute with works of charity, works of love, good deeds. The important thing is we cannot impose," Coronel told reporters at the CBCP.

Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin, on the other hand, called for sacrifice during the Lenten season with a "spirit of prayer and penitence to take on sacrifice and the discipline of self."

"The Lenten season is the shortest year of us Christians can make the spiritual exercise.... This time of lent, let us pray until sure for our sinfulness," Sin said.

BEST WISHES for the New Year are splashed across a float in Manila being prepared for today's festivities. —

So, is Marcos money intact? And where is it?

Front page A1

would be spent on land reform, is unrealized.

In 1998, the Marcos assets were transferred from Swiss banks to an escrow account in Philippine National Bank.

The Supreme Court had ruled that the money was ill-gotten and forfeited it in favor of the government.

Bureau of Treasury

In March 2004, then Agrarian Reform Secretary Jose Mario Pomer announced that $624 million of the amount was already with the Bureau of Treasury and was to be used for land reform.

"Since the amounts are depositing," Mariano said, "$683 million was transferred in 1998. When it passes the Bureau of Treasury, it was already released to BLGU millions."

Mariano said he had reason to believe the money did not go to land reform at all.

He said an agreement dated July 30, 2004, was entered into by the Bureau of Treasury then headed by Eduardo Ongpin (which ended the PNB, whose Trust Banking Group was appointed custodian of the funds.

However, the agreement was terminated in March of the same year, and Mina Figueroa, the new treasurer, entered.

Bank in Singapore

PNB president Lorenzo Tan said the money was "handed to the national treasury already" except for some funds stuck with Marcos in Singapore.

Marilou Sarmiento, head of the PNB trust department, said about $25 million was still with Swiss UK Singapore because of an intercreditor case. When PNB was withdrawing the money, Swiss UK decided to leave to a Singaporean court the decision to identify the parties entitled to the fund. Others are claiming it.

$30-M retention fund

Sarmiento said there was also $30 million to $35 million in a retention fund. Under the escrow agreement, the amount is for whatever litigation expenses that will be incurred.

Once the case is settled, she assuring funds will be given back to the national treasury, she said.

House Majority Leader Prospero Nograles was quick to defend Malacañang from charges that it was short-changing victims of human rights abuses of their rightful compensation.

Nograles doubted Sen. Juker Arroyo for maneuvering that P5 billion of the promised P11 billion ($200 million) to be given the victims was missing just because Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye had erred in saying that the amount promised was P6 billion.

Nograles said the President had already made to compensate the victims.

Compensation bill

"We cannot just take the money out of an ATM machine. But Senator Juker knows that the Arroyo administration is committed to compensate the human rights victims for the brutality suffered under Marcos," he said.

Bombo City Rep. Mamer Pamorada accused members of Congress, some of whom were also victims of human rights violations during martial law, that a compensation bill, now on second reading, would be passed by Congress.

Pamorada also agreed that the indemnification of victims was a "necessary part of the justice that they have been seeking."

Albay Rep. Edcel Lagman said distressed would not be left with an empty bag following the decision of a United States appeals court upholding the Philippine Supreme Court's ruling forfeiting the Marcos money to the government.

Lagman said the victims' right to compensation was guaranteed by the Constitution in the Bill of Rights and in the newly enacted law, the powers of the Commission on Human Rights.

"But I must stress those constitutional provisions are not self-implementing. there is a need for Congress to enact a law providing for compensation.

18 years later ...

The compensation bill, if ever it becomes law, will amend CARL, which provides that all recovered ill-gotten wealth of the Marcoses should go to land reform.

"What is inordinately traumatizing is 18 years after the expulsion of the Marcos dictatorship, justice still eludes thousands of desaparecidos (disappeared), summary victims, the maimed and the dead who fought the 'diktat,'" Lagman said. — Reports from Cynthia D. Balana and Julie Lobo; InterAksyon

Bongbong: Not me but gov't duty to pay victims

Front page A1

heirs not legally obligated to pay his father's debts," Bongbong's attorney Jake Siruba said. "The Philippine government is responsible for providing the money."

Where is Marcos wealth?

Bongbong, through his lawyer, said he did not know where the assets from the Marcos estate were, and that he was cooperating with the court in try to locate them.

Harry Roque, an attorney for the more than 9,500 victims, challenged the notion that Bongbong and his family, including former first lady Imelda Marcos, were unable to start paying the money to the victims.

"There are personal assets," Roque said. "Imelda Marcos voiced a plan for $750,000 to fly back to the Philippines. She will live in a very glorious lifestyle."

Sharing the assets

Read is overseeing the distribution of the assets to a class-action lawsuit, whose plaintiffs won a $1 billion judgment against the Marcos estate in 1995. The award has grown through the years to $1.7 billion with interest.

The 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco on Friday rejected a request by the plaintiffs to receive the $683 million in Marcos assets that were transferred from a Swiss account to the Philippine government.

Those funds include $40 million that has been held in an escrow account because of competing claims of ownership by the Marcos estate, the Philippine government and the human rights victims.

New hearing

Attorneys for Andres Luty, a Swanson, an financial company set up by Marcos that originally held the $40 million, appealed that ruling.

Arguments in the appeal are to be heard before the 9th Circuit Court in March.

To date many of the human victims have received money.

Makalintal has said it is working to amend a law stipulating that Marcos assets should be used exclusively for the agrarian reform program, so that some of the money could be used to indemnify the martial law victims.

CARP will suffer

But Land Reform Secretary Rene Villa said yesterday that using the Marcos assets to compensate the victims would mean a reduced amount needed for paying for land to be acquired under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

Villa said he could only hope that the government would compensate for it by increasing the budget of the Department of Agrarian Reform.

Villa said an estimated P80 billion from the Marcos wealth had been allocated for land reform. While some of the amount has already been spent for CARP, more than P8 billion is still intact, he said.

Using CARP fund opposed

Rufino Caragay, spokesperson of the Lagman Workers' Alliance-Bayan, said there could be no justification for removing the funding support for CARP in favor of the victims of the Marcos regime.

"The indemnification of the victims of the amount due them or the rejection of amending the CARP law is lopsided and deprives does not justify the social justice spirit of the law and can never be used to justify inaction favoring the claimants," Caragay said.

"I will all the more create social unrest among agrarian reform beneficiaries who, at the same time, were victims of Marcos' martial law," he added.

Bayan said amending the CARP Law passed a big threat to legitimate agrarian reform beneficiaries.

Big landlords

He said it showed the "utter absence of political will of the Arroyo administration" which, he said, appeared to be prepared to succumb to the pressures of big landlords opposed to CARP.

"While three more years remaining to the 10-year extension of CARP ... the land-lords identified with the government are exploiting all possibilities to exclude ownership of lands, as opposed to the spirit of the CARP that 'no land long smuggled for," he said.

Victims are heroes

The rights group Task Force Detainees of the Philippines, for its part, called on the government to apologize to the martial law victims, to declare them heroes, and compensate them with money from the national budget.

"We call for an official recognition of the human rights violations during the martial law regime of President Ferdinand Marcos through a presidential proclamation to organize the lingering effects of Proclamation 1081," said Marian Serong, TFDP executive director.

The group said the official recognition could take the form of a national marker to the victims of the dictatorship.

Closing dark chapter

"It is high time that the government make an apology to the thousands of victims of martial law [because] the Philippine government allowed itself to be used for brutal repression and economic plunder," Serong said.

"This Congress must enact the compensation law which has been due for almost two decades already," Patong added. "Justice must recovered ill-gotten wealth, the compensation would come from the national budget."

Patong said: "Two decades after Edsa, we must close that dark past through recognition of the pains and courage of those who fought against the dictatorship, through restitution and compensation." With reports from Carla D. Gomez, PDI; Victoria Batavia, Norman Bordadora in Manila, and AP

"BONGBONG" Marcos Jr., governor of Ilocos Norte, greets the Pandakila community during a reception for him at the governor's mansion, in Honolulu, Tuesday. -AP

Oops, it's P11B, not P8B, says Bunye

By Juliet Labog-Javellana

PRESS Secretary Ignacio Bunye yesterday corrected himself and said the amount President Macapagal-Arroyo had set aside to indemnify martial law victims was actually $200 million.

"President Macapagal-Arroyo had committed $200 million for human rights victims, and I stand corrected," Bunye said in a statement.

He initially announced she was setting aside the amount that the chairman of the Supreme Court last year declared that the Marcos deposits were ill-gotten wealth and forfeited them in favor of the government.

The deposits have since grown to $683 million.

Bunye was responding to Sen. Juker Arroyo, who had taken him to task for saying the amount allocated for the victims was only P6 billion, when the amount actually included in the proposed budget was $200 million—or P11 billion.

His duress has softened the setting aside of $200 million pending an amendment to the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law, which mandates that all proceeds from recovery of Marcos assets should go to agrarian reform.

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Wednesday, February 9, 2005
Ash Wednesday

1st Reading: Joel 2:12-18
2nd Reading: 2 Cor 5:20-6:2
Gospel: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Jesus said to his disciples, "Be careful not to make a show of your righteousness before people. If you do so, you do not gain anything from your Father in heaven. When you give alms, do not announce this as the hypocrites do in synagogues and in the streets in order to be praised by the people. I assure you, they have been already paid in full.

If you give something to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your gift remains really secret. Your Father who sees what is kept secret will reward you.

When you fast, do not put on a miserable face as do the hypocrites. They put on gloomy faces, so people can see they are fasting. I tell you this: they have been paid in full already. Whenever you fast, wash your face and make yourself look cheerful, because you are not fasting for appearances as for people, but for your Father who sees beyond appearances. And your Father, who sees what is kept secret will reward you."

Commentary

The duties call you forth deep in your hearts, say your garments. And, return to God who is gracious, compassionate. Our lord alone—at once for us to admit from evil, but from impurities and superficial religious practice alone or our own self-aggrandizement and the good impressions of others. And this tranquil sounds the call to the whole community. We're in this together. There is to be no outward show of pious behaviors, fasting, long prayers in public, even others thinking if we give alms. This is offered just by all sinners—we first—the blind Pharisees of all ages and so in during our bread and justice with others, in almagining that persons those who wander and in prayer that reads our hearts Father God, breaks our selfsaid ups, handing to Father our practices Father who sees us so. In the freedom of the children of God—all of us, helping each other. This is the story of service because our God and us, in love, Father help us to make this earth a never until dividing true because You alone are Love and who walk in love is in God. Amen.

(Scripture Publications Inc., 4 Marconi St., UP Village, Diliman, Quezon City, GP. Box 4, Diliman, 1101 Quezon City; Tel: 921-2446; Fax: 921-9429; E-mail: scripbooks@pcp.net; Website: http://www.bible.ph/scripture (Christian Publications Inc.) & http://missionaries.ofmcap.org (Capuchins of the Philippines)

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INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

PNOC - Energy Development Corporation (PNOC-EDC) invites interested contractors to apply for eligibility and to bid for the project:

WAREHOUSE RENTAL FOR OSD AND EDD EDC04-155

The Approved Budget is P13,810,800.00 chargeable against PNOC-EDC funds. The contract duration is 2 years.

Application Forms for Eligibility and Bid Documents may be secured from the PNOC-EDC Contracts Administration Group at its H.A Estimo bldg. starting **February 3, 2005 upon** payment of a non-refundable fee of Pesos: Five Hundred (P500.00).

For the purpose of clarifying certain issues, a pre-bid conference will be held on **February 14, 2005, 2:00 p.m.** at the EAC Conference Room, First Floor Bldg. 5, PNOC-EDC, Fort Bonifacio.

Applications for Eligibility and sealed bids shall be received by the PNOC-EDC Contracts Administration Group at PNOC-EDC, 1st floor Bldg. 5, Fort Bonifacio, Taguig, Metro Manila **not later than 2:00 p.m. on February 28, 2005** and shall be publicly opened immediately thereafter.

PNOC - EDC reserves the right to reject any or all bids or parts thereof, to waive any informality thereof, to abort the bidding process, to accept such bids or to award any parts of the work to any bidder whose bid is considered most advantageous to PNOC - EDC.

EAC CHAIRMAN

METRO

Text us your feedback: inquirer.metro@inquirer.com.ph (Globe) or 241 (Smart) Editor Boots C. Dipasupil ■ Assistant Editor Carmen S. Rico

'Sticky business' for Chinese New Year

By Tina V. Quintanilla

LAST MINUTE shoppers trooped to Manila's populous Chinatown district yesterday to buy red candy, good luck charms and trinkets to usher in the Year of the Rooster, but lovers of the hugely popular "tikoy" (sticky rice cake), a food-selling item that sold briskly on the eve of the Chinese New Year, [the related story is on page A1.]

The crowds mingled with early-entry makers who were ambushed in Binondo's cultural streets already decked with Chinese lanterns and red banners.

"My family always bought 'hopia' and 'tikoy' at this time of the year ever since I was a young girl," said Gino Peregrino, who ordered several boxes of the famous Chinese delicacy at the Eng Bee Tin Chinese Deli on Ongpin Street.

Peregrino, now 29, traveled to the Filipino-Chinese community in Manila—the only one in the country with a Chinatown district—with her sister all the way from their native Iloilo province to buy P1,000 worth of "tikoy" that now comes in round flavors like strawberry, pandan, ube and cheese-and-ube.

NO TABLE in Langhua without the popular "tikoy" a perennial bestseller in Chinatown's bake shops

Hurrying, togetherness

The Chinese buy "tikoy" for the new year, believing that the sweet cake made of sticky rice, sugar, water and oil represented togetherness and would bring harmony to the family.

"I bought the cakes for my relatives back home. It's really a yearly thing with us," said Peregrino.

Scores of "tikoy" fans like her flocked to one of Chinatown's biggest delis during the weekend to buy the best selling delicacy, said Horacio Gutierrez, a store clerk for five years now at Eng Bee Tin.

The oriental delicacy and baked goods shop established in the '70s sold the favorite white and brown plain "tikoy" that sold from P72 to P178 and the new flavors that cost P100 for a small box, and P320 for the big box.

Indeed, the "tikoy" has come a long way, from the chewy rice flour delicacy in today's trendy flavors, run into one previous, dipped in a batter of beaten egg yolks, and pan-fried.

"Our trucks had been delivering supplies non-stop since Sunday and orders had increased five times than the usual," said Gutierrez, who monitored the comings and goings of the deli's delivery trucks, and the distribution of "tikoy" boxes to Eng Bee Tin's three branches in Binondo.

Gutierrez said their branches had to extend its store hours to 10 p.m. to cater to the chaos that came in droves.

Motorcade

Saturday, Manila Mayor Lito Atienza led city residents in welcoming the Chinese New Year with a motorcade that wound its way around the streets of Binondo. With the mayor were Rep. Miles Rocco, officials of the Chinatown Development Authority, and prominent members of the Chinese-Filipino community.

Atienza said that the city was proud of its Chinese historical and cultural roots. "We have always made it a point to celebrate major Chinese cultural events, especially the Chinese New Year," [STORY A2.]

MMDA men, Palace workers in traffic spat

By Tina G. Santos

THREE Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) employees and three workers from Malacañang engaged in a free-for-all following a minor traffic altercation Monday night in Mandaluyong, Cebu Daily News.

Nemesio Laguna, 40, reported, Julian Bigueras, 22, and Romeo Cortez, 22, all of the MMDA Sidewalk Clearing Operations Group (SCOG) accused Malacañang employees Mariano Javier, 31, church bus driver; Rolando Dizon, 40, stay-in mechanic at Malacañang Motor Pool; and Emmanuel de Leon, 34, of allegedly insulting them.

The employees from the Office of the President, however, countered in file charges of physical injuries against their accusers.

A police report showed that the incident happened around 6:30 p.m. near the Southern Metro in Kiko.

Police said the Malacañang employees, on board a bus, were reportedly traveling northbound along Edsa when Laguna told the driver to stop while his two companions tried to settle a problem with sidewalk vendors whom they apprehended in the area.

Julian then stepped on the brakes and nearly hit a pushcart on the road, prompting him and Dizon to alight from the bus to check their vehicle for damages, police said.

Finding no damage done, the two were about to board their bus when they reportedly heard some body shouting curses at them.

This resulted in a heated argument between the MMDA and Malacañang groups. A free-for-all soon ensued in the busy thoroughfare, blocking traffic in the process.

The six men all sustained bruises and contusions after the fight that was halted when a passing mobile patrol unit intervened.

The area soon later brought to a police detention center for questioning.

METROBRIEFS

Writer stabbed

DABLOS columnist Pablo Antonio Del Rio, 40, of Valenzuela City, was wounded after he was stabbed by Jose Pedrena, 34, inside a billiard hall in Quezon City before dawn yesterday. Investigators said Pedrena, of Caloocan City, attacked Hernandez at 3:45 a.m. inside the Gala Pocket Billiard Hall on Quezon Avenue. The victim said the suspect could have been sent by people he had criticized in his columns.

TINA ESMERO

Troubled marriages

MARRIED couples who need marriage counseling can avail help from a Retrouvaille weekend scheduled on Feb. 11 to 13 at the Mother of Mercy Spiritual Center, NSC-Road, Barangay San Jose (near San Pablo Seminary), Tagaytay City. For more information, couples may call Fr. Daniel Ong at 525-3281 or 0918-9025651 and Ben and Ineng Tolosa at 998-9119.

Mind Center forum

THE MEDICAL Center Manila Department of Psychiatry will hold its Third Scientific Forum and the Friends of Psychiatry Foundation Inc. will hold its first psychopaedia course with the topic "Updates of Basic Psychiatry Knowledge" on Feb. 12 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Pearl Manila Ballroom, Gen. Luna St. corner Taft Avenue, Ermita. Those interested to attend may contact Dr. Carlos Cuaky or Dr. Jesus Gonzales-prod. nos. 408-6000, 523-8131 loc. 19 52, (0905) 580-4868, (0915) 809-7907. or you may e-mail them at pmhsmedia@yahoo.com.

Prosecutor not giving any extension to Martin Soriano

By Philip C. Tubeza

TIRE is running out for Martin Soriano.

A Department of Justice prosecutor yesterday said that he was not inclined to extend the period for the former National Bureau of Investigation agent in file his answer to the kidnapping charges against him.

Barring a preliminary investigation of the DOJ, prosecuting attorney Erwin Manaya said he was not inclined to grant the request of lawyer Renato Inocencio, Soriano's counsel, to allow his client to file his counter-affidavit only after the Philippine National Police finishes its investigation on the 11 Manila policemen linked to the former NBI confidential agent.

"We cannot wait that long," Manaya said.

He said he would wait for the formal request from Inocencio's counsel before he resolves the kidnapping, illegal possession of firearms, and robbery holdup charges against Soriano and 13 others.

Besides Soriano, the other respondents were Jaime Danny Bendico, 29, and security Ramon Guanzon, 45, a certain Bebang, and eight John Does.

They were charged before the DOJ with the kidnapping of Carolino Griffin, a resident of Ayala Heights in Quezon City at the Global Inn on F. Ilustre Street, Makati City on Jan. 26.

Inocencio and Bendico yesterday filed a joint counter-affidavit and denied any involvement in the kidnapping.

They said they were with Soriano's children in his apartment at the Phelan Building on Jan. 26.

Griffen said she had gone to Global Inn to meet Bebang to attend a party at Global Inn. But when she got there, Soriano allegedly accosted her and held her at gunpoint inside Room 1105.

Soriano's group allegedly "arrested" Griffen for possession of illegal drugs.

The former NBI agent alleged-ly demanded P2 million but later agreed to taking an Isuzu Crosswind SUV and $1,000 from Griffen's friend, James Mary Lim.

C5-KALAYAAN REOPENING

Makati blames MMDA for traffic

By Margaux C. Ortiz

MAKATI City resisted a closed lane of the C5-Kalayaan intersection opened, but it now blaming the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority for the resulting traffic.

It's sabotage, according to Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay in a press statement issued yesterday.

But MMDA Traffic Operations Center Executive Director Angelito Vergel de Dios is saying Makati should not put the blame on them.

This developed as motorists and commuters observed that traffic has come to a crawl at the intersection after the city opened the Makati-bound line of Kalayaan Avenue to ease-ing traffic.

Traffic became specially chaotic on Feb. 3, the day Makati opened the closed lane.

Binay said, "The MMDA cannot disclaim any responsibility for the traffic breakdown at C5-Kalayaan."

The mayor accused the MMDA of pulling out its traffic enforcers at the height of the evening rush hour to put the city in a bad light.

In a letter to MMDA Chair Bayani Fernando, Binay said traffic lights in the area also malfunctioned after the pull-out.

Binay said they could file administrative charges against MMDA officials and personnel and charge the agency for the cost of restoring the original traffic scheme in the area.

The mayor explained that the city decided to open the line and restore the MMDA-U turn slot in the area following complaints from motorists and an alleged increase in the number of vehicular accidents in the area.

Binay also said that an MMDA survey dated Sept. 11, 2004, showed that the average travel speed on C5 decreased from 63 to 43 percent after the closure of the lane and adoption of the U-turn scheme at the intersection.

Vergel de Dios denied knowledge of the survey Binay was using to justify the reopening of the intervening lane on Kalayaan Avenue.

"I would be highly irresponsible of us to continue implementing the scheme after that survey proved it useless," Vergel de Dios said in a phone interview.

He said their enforcers left the area starting last week after the Makati Department of Public Safety (DPS) personnel had taken over traffic management at the intersection.

"Their people and our enforcers had totally different ideas of how to ease traffic in the area," Vergel de Dios explained.

Regarding the malfunctioning traffic lights, Vergel de Dios said these were not connected to the MMDA traffic command center, making it impossible for MMDA to sabotage them.

"We did everything the Makati City government wanted even though the area is part of a national road and under our jurisdiction," Vergel de Dios said.

Motorists and commuters asked by the reporters have expressed dismay at the slow down of traffic in the intersection ever since the scheme was changed last week.

'Sticky business'... Metro tourist route spruced up for visitors

By Margaux C. Ortiz

IN A bid to attract more foreign visitors to the country the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) has started an intensive cleanup and beautification of roads leading to and from the international airport.

With them "Pack na Hakab, Dayuyon Di Dayamak" (A Better Place Attracts Its Business) program, MMDA Chair Bayani Fernando said visitors would be encouraged to return to the country if their eyes are always treated to cleanliness and clingy banderolas providing them open their senses.

"We do not want such eyesores to scare off tourists and potential investors," Fernando said in an interview.

The MMDA chair said they had begun cleaning the sidewalks of Metro Manila's tourist route, which includes Airport Road, Mia Road, Roxas Boulevard, South Superhighway and Quirino Avenue.

Fernando said their aside from erecting plant boxes on the sidewalks, they had also demolished illegal structures, including banderolas hello and giant billboards.

The program is in line with MMDA's campaign to clear the roads and sidewalks of the metropolis in an effort to make Metro Manila more attractive and livable.

Republic of the Philippines
Department of Transportation and Communications
TOLL REGULATORY BOARD

NORTH LUZON EXPRESSWAY
Approved Initial Authorized Toll Rates

Notice is hereby given that the Toll Regulatory Board ("TRB") has approved the following Initial Authorized Toll Rates for the Closed System and Open System applicable to Phase 1 of the North Luzon Tollway Project starting at 12:00 A.M., February 8, 2005, Tuesday:

Vehicle Class	Closed system (Peso per km)	Open system (Peso per entry)
Class 1	2.483838	42.406899
Class 2	6.209596	106.017496
Class 3	7.451515	127.220996

This notice is being made pursuant to TRB Board Resolution No. 2005-04 dated 27 January 2005 which requires publication of the initial Authorized Toll Rates once in a newspaper of general circulation in accordance with law.

Any interested expressway user shall have the right to file within a period of ninety (90) days from the date of publication of this notice, a petition with the TRB at the 2nd Floor, Integrated Bar of the Philippines Building, Julia Vargas Avenue, Ortigas Center, Pasig City for a review of the initial toll rates.

SO ORDERED.

By Authority of the Board:

(SGD) MANUEL G. IMPERIAL
Executive Director
Toll Regulatory Board

Approved Toll Fees of the New NLE

Effective February 08, 2005

CONGRATULATIONS: Phone Pals tries to create space against the defense of Talk 'N Text forward Dave Carnazo.

Phone Pals gun for 3rd straight win over Kings

By Ronnie Domingo
Philippine Daily Inquirer

Score by Quarters
Phone Pals 19-17, 20-20, 20-20, 21-20 — 80
Kings 20-11, 20-20, 20-20, 20-20 — 80

Game 1—Talk 'N Text vs. Sta. Lucia, 7:30 p.m.
Game 2—Talk 'N Text vs. Barangay Ginebra, 9:30 p.m.
Game 3—Talk 'N Text vs. Barangay Ginebra, 7:30 p.m.
Game 4—Talk 'N Text vs. Barangay Ginebra, 9:30 p.m.

BY NOW, Talk 'N Text should have realized the folly of fighting Air Enchanted in Game 1.

Had they kept Yeadons in the frame in deference to a longer-standard suspension, the Phone Pals could have had a 1-1 advantage over the Barangay Ginebra Kings going into Game 3 of the PBA Philippine Cup Finals tonight at the Araneta Coliseum.

It would have been a big edge since only one team—ironically it was Yeadons against Hall in the 2004 First Conference—had survived both from a 1-3 deficit to raise a best-of-seven series.

In moments of a confusion, all the Phone Pals have to remember, Talk 'N Text suddenly gained momentum after tying the series at 2-2 following a 90-86 win over the Kings in Game 4.

The series-clinching victory came a few days after the Phone Pals fell behind by 0-2 courtesy of a last-second Game 1 victory, which they handily won, 89-75.

And with the series tied, Game 5 has suddenly become so crucial.

"Whoever wins Game 5 will have a big advantage over the other," said Talk 'N Text coach Joel Banal, expecting another tough night in the gains to be served by ABC 5 at 7:30.

"Although there's no guarantee, the winner of Game 5 will at least be in a better position to win the championship," he added.

More than Game 1 heroics, Willie Miller and Jimmy Alapag have been donning out explosive performances game after game.

The frenzies was triggered by the Talk 'N Text coach's decision to start up Yeadons on the strength of a Quezon City court order despite the league's unflinching stand to continue suspending the 2003 MVP.

Coach Yeap has also been saying his role is Talk 'N Text's chief stormer is the left with Yeadons, Hall of Famers Vic Pablo and Bogs Adornado and Ato Agustin.

"I have to commend them on that Game 4 performance," said Banal of his key players.

"I hope they will continue to play this way until the end of the series and give Carolina a type of competition like this classic 41," he added.

Plagued by turnovers and hounded by Southern's zone, the Kings are looking for a quick-fix solution to prevent Talk 'N Text from picking up a third straight series victory.

"Hopefully, we could find a solution," said Barangay Ginebra coach Siot Tanquingcen. "We can't afford to make 24 turnovers and expect to win."

Eric Menk, the league's player of the conference, missed all of his four field shots and was slapped with a three-second violation at a crucial point of Game 4.

Mark Caguioa erupted for 41 points but misfired two free-throw attempts when everything was on the line.

"But I don't have word to cut on my players. I know they'll play hard come Wednesday (today)," said Tanquingcen.

"Maybe's going to be easy from now on to the end. But one thing's for sure, every time people question us or start doubting us, that's the time we play our best."

Jane Navarro

Cua tops MCC amateur ladies

CAGOODMAN Joe Bachelor Cua defeated scratch-ace leader Christy Lanot of Bombay of Cubao, Quezon City, in the seventh and final round to emerge champion at the recent Metropolitan Chess Club (MCC) Ladies Amateur active chess tournament held at the 2 & F Drive-Thru along Aurora Blvd. in Quezon City.

Cua scored 6.5 points to receive the top prize of P3,000 in the event organized by MCC founding chair and former Olympian WIM Mila Bogovadia. Bernadeth finished with 5.0 points and dropped to a draw of 2nd to 5th places with Gina Eduardo, Aileen Nina Cuesa and Jennifer Arcinue. All of them received P750 each. Rounding off the top ten winners were Erlenne Hagos (6.0), Christine Dacuan (4.0), Louise Blanco (3.5), Jaqueelyn and Ian Jaddyn Pronda. MM Morton Bernardino, Contributor

Celis eyes tune-up games abroad

By Dennis U. Eroa

NOT EVEN the sudden resignation of nine veteran members of the national women's basketball team will deter new coach Raymond Celis from forming a highly competitive squad in time for this year's SEA Games.

"I never thought that istrigues are going to be a part of my coaching life. Maybe they (players) thought that Chel are xingbazille," said the former UP Maroon playmaker, who replaced Rai Cristobal as the helm of the national squad.

Celis said the coaching staff is working double hard and scouting the provinces for future Nationals.

"If plans don't misarry, we're also going to play tune-up matches in Europe and Korea," Celis told yesterday's PBA forum.

Also a result of his ballo Gimeldalla, Celis said a shaking chair during a repair for probable Nationals.

"Coast (Cristina) told me I should show my worth to a coach during the tryout. I told her that isn't it the other way around. The player must show her worth to Celis, I said.

The 5-foot-11 Cuan, the Lobianes and Emelie Naya are among those who quit the team after Celis replaced Cristobal as head coach.

Celis, however, continues to feel upbeat about the future of the Nationals.

"National interest is above all interest," said Celis. "The coaching staff isn't going to lose sleep regarding the resignations."

Basketball Association of the Philippines (BAP) vice president Boy Cuddleyer, who met with Celis in the afternoon supervised by Red Bull, Agfa Colors and Pepsi, said all the new coaching staff was asking for is to give them the chance to implement its training program.

Celis said he is forming a call for first lineup that could stand a chance against the region's major powers in women's basketball, its season Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia as among the probable SEA contenders.

"The chances of winning would depend on the material that we can get," said the oldest son of former Cebuano player Jun and sports columnist Sarah Celis.

CROWNED! TROPHY! New England Patriots vice chairman Jonathan Kraft (left) raises the Vince Lombardi Trophy in the fans gathered to greet the Patriots as they return from their Super Bowl victory. REUTERS

Espinosa-Cruz tiff slated in California

ESPINOSA: Scrapping at 27

REFUSING to be cowed by calls for him to retire, former two-division world champ Leodin "Leido" Espinosa will face a new opponent for his bout on Feb. 18 in the United States.

The 27-year-old champ is now set to face Jayvee Sanchez Rhodes Cruz-Jed "Jacandoy" Cruz in the main event of a card to be held at the Stockton Memorial Civic Auditorium in Stockton, California.

Originally Espinosa MT-12, 26 KOs) was set to face another Mexican in Martin Osuna on the same date, but apparently negotiations bogged down.

Cruz has a record of 29 wins, 7 loss es, 1 draw with 16 victories via the short route.

Unlike Espinosa's previous foes, Carlos Navarro and Zalat Salseon, Cruz will provide Espinosa a chance to redeem himself with a win. After all, Cruz is not known to be a noncible fighter, but rather a smart boxer-thrower who gives the Filipino a chance to shine.

Also serving as one of the seven bouts card are cohesive junior welter Arturo Morales (7-4-0-1, 4 KOs) vs Antonio Dimaculangan (14-4-1, 11 KOs) in an eight-rounder. The card will be aired on Daily Boxing's "Daily Fight Night" telecast, according to fightnews last win L. Lagunzad

Generals clinch NCRAA diadem

By Rey Lachica
Inquirer NE Bureau

NEAR Sorgos played the game of his life yesterday, powering the Isabela Agricultural College Generals to their first ever title in the 12th National Capital Region Athletic Association (NCRAA) men's basketball championship at the Rizal Sports Complex.

The 6-foot-3 Sorgos delivered 20 points in leading the Generals to a 69-61 overtime victory over the College de San Lorenzo Griffins in Game 2 of their best-of-three finals series.

Sorgos, who is on his last playing with the Generals, posted 10 points in the extra period, enabling IAC to outscore itself from a 59-59 regulation deadlock.

It was a performance, which earned Sorgos the Most Valuable Player award and gave the Generals their first NCRAA championship in the men.

"We've been waiting for this for a long time. It took us all years to put up a competitive team. It doesn't come with one championship, but this," said a beaming-toned IAC coach Nonoy Mar as his boys poured water over each other and over the heads of their opponents in celebration.

Earlier, La Salle Manila men over Philippine Maritime Institute, 82-57, to extend the women's best-of-three finals to a Game 3.

Mari David had 23 points while Arriane Prado shot 17 as the Lady Archers hosted back from a 39-40 loss in Game 1.

Chito Jaime led the Griffins with 19 points and tied the match at 76 with his triple with 27 ticks to go.

He could have won the match for Cafil, with nine ticks to go. But a dribbling error forced the Griffins to commit a costly turnover.

The Generals, who swept their 6-0 series at 3:51 took Game 1 with an 82-72 triumph.

In the men of the intermediate round, Sorgos drew 16 and then scored on a pass by Benjie Bontuyan with 3:52 to go, touching off a 9-2 surge which gave IAC an 65-59 edge.

Bontuyan made 10 points and Sir Jaime replaced the third game as the Generals took a 65-55 spread.

Rordrigo headlines Bakbakan sa Tagaytay 3

By Salvador L. Lagumbay, Contributor

FOLLOWING his impressive first round knockout win over a Thai dagger last Jan. 20, ex-IBF Pinoy boxing boss Edgar "Bombat dolero" Rodrigo jumps into action right away as he faces Flash Gudajaro in the manner of the "Bakbakan sa Tagaytay-Tier 3" on Feb. 22 at the Tagaytay Sports Center.

The fight, set to start at 2 p.m. is tagged as a Philippine flyweight championship elimination, with the winner getting the right to challenge reigning IBF 112-lb. champ Federico Catalloy of Cebu.

Promoter Lope Sitoral Jr. said yesterday that Tagaytay City Mayor Abraham Tolentino will award the trophy to the winner of the main event.

Rodrigo is set to embark on a comeback trail after his near-promising career took a nosedive following back-to-back losses to Japan. Prior to that, he had knocked out Colombo Z. Gomez, a less than unexpected Rodrigo into the country's color line.

In the chief support, Dexter Cuevas of Johnny Edoble Buddies host Rolando Mamaia Stabili in another 10-rounder in the bantamweight class.

The rest of the card pits Allan Fuentes against Jojo Rodrigo; Dandee Francisco versus Elmer Antiquinido; Gerry Beltran against Ruel Bautista; and Monico Laurente versus Jessie Mendoza.

Question of the Week

What is your reaction to Imelda Marcos' elation over the US court ruling preventing human rights victims from sharing $683 million in Marcos assets that was turned over to the government?

Send your answers to 1111 (Smart), 2222 (Globe) or 333 (Sun).
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PC BUYER'S GUIDE

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2000

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

B1

BUSINESS

John Paul D. Morada
Assistant Editor Carrie E. Nocheseda

BIR sets lifestyle check on doctors

By Michelle V. Rama

THE BUREAU of Internal Revenue will continue a lifestyle check on doctors after its study revealed a high level of tax delinquency among medical professionals from the country's leading and high-cost hospitals.

"These doctors do not issue receipts. They do not even have books of account," Revenue Deputy Commissioner Lilia Guillermo told reporters yesterday.

Guillermo said the BIR had already given notices to doctors from the leading hospitals in Metro Manila that they would be investigated. The notices were issued after the doctors failed to avail last year's theme "Bookkeeping 2000 income tax return despite repeated warnings by the revenue agency.

The lifestyle check will be the core of the BIR's campaign against tax delinquent but high-earning professionals, she said.

According to the BIR study, 57 percent of the doctors from the five top hospitals declared that their income for the whole of 2000 only fell within the range of P100,000 to P500,000. This means that these doctors were earning only as much as average income earners do, a claim that the BIR considered unbelievable.

The study, which used income tax returns (ITRs) of 695 doctors as samples, also showed that a little more than 30 percent of these doctors declared that they earned less than P100,000. Also, 4 percent of them claimed that they had no income at all.

"How can they afford rent to their luxurious hospitals and salaries of their staff if they are earning less than P100,000 a year?" Guillermo said.

The study also showed that 22.5 percent of these doctors declared their their incomes in 2000 fell within the P500,000 to P1 million bracket. Twenty-nine percent said their incomes reached between P1 million and P5 million, and that only about one percent said they were earning between P1 million and P10 million.

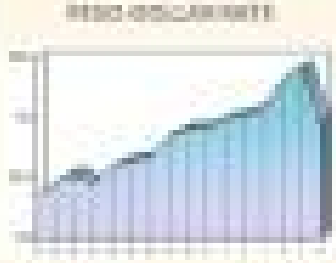
Guillermo said that in the lifestyle check on the doctors, the BIR would look a checklist of the vehicles and the pieces of real property they own, the travels they make, and the schools where they send their children to school, among others.

Based on the data, Guillermo said, the BIR would predict the amount of tax liabilities of these doctors.

The BIR official also said that the revenue agency was able to detect tax delinquency among doctors through their e-mail queries. In the queries, consumers were asked to send the serial numbers of the receipts they got from purchases of goods and services, and the amount they paid.

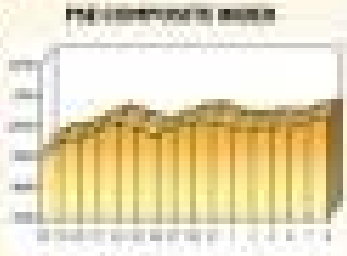
She cited one case wherein a patient reported to the BIR, through text messaging, that she was

Currencies



Stock Market

Stocks hit highest in 5 years



DOLLAR REBOUND

Peso back at 55 to $1

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE PESO yesterday slipped back to the 55-level against the US dollar as the greenback rebounded across the globe following a tighter budget policy announced by the White House.

After hitting a 19-month high of 54.52 on Monday, the local currency weakened sharply after opening at 54.90 and reached the 55-level about 30 minutes after the start of trading at the Philippine Dealing System yesterday.

It finished at 55.03 to the dollar, shedding a hefty 48 centavos from Monday's close at 54.55 to the dollar, the biggest loss in a single day move since the peso traded its rally against the US dollar this year.

Volume at the spot foreign exchange market remained heavy at $470 million.

This developed as the US dollar surged to a two-month high against the Japanese yen and likewise extended its gains against the euro.

Traders said the technical correction did not come as a surprise as the local currency had to cut $4.85-90 after the US dollar posted significant gains in two successive sessions.

"This is just a temporary respite of the market's bullishness," said a foreign exchange trader from a big local bank.

"It's a knee-jerk reaction to the US dollar's upward as well as supply concerns over the holidays and there's tight squeeze," the trader said.

It was the eve of the Chinese lunar calendar year yesterday signaling the start of the Year of the Dragon.

Other traders said many market players also took advantage of talks that the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas was buying dollars from the spot market and took positions against the local currency.

The White House presented on Monday one of the most austere presidential budgets in

Megaworld to spend P3B for CyberPark project

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

LEADING property developer Megaworld is spending P3 billion to develop a piece of its 40-office building at the Eastwood City CyberPark in Quezon City for the business process outsourcing and information technology services.

Megaworld said in a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange that its board has approved the plan to undertake the project. Eastwood Cyber Twenty-One, in two phases.

The first phase, which will cost about P1.5 billion to P2.5 billion, will have a gross building area of 40,000 square meters. The second phase will have an area of about 30,000

Citing crisis, wood sector seeks lifting of logging suspension

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

THE ORGANIZATION of Philippine wood exporters is asking the government to lift the suspension of logging activities in the country.

The Mindanao Philippine Wood Producers Association (MPWPA) said in a press conference yesterday that its members are now facing a "crisis" and the industry area is the brink of collapse. Its members have no other option but to close shop if the suspension would remain.

PWPA said the government's move to ban other illegal loggers in Quezon Province, which was hit by flooding last December, covered the entire country and had adversely affected even industries and companies that were operating legally.

"The PWPA, representing the legitimate wood based and wood producing industries, makes this urgent appeal to President Macapagal Arroyo to cause the Secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to immediately lift the temporary suspension of logging to areas not affected by the calamities of December 2004," Fourain Marwan A., vice-president and spokesperson of PWPA, said.

The government's order to suspend logging activities was imposed last Dec. 8.

Marwan said the prolonged suspension of logging activities would mean the massive shutdown in the near two months of its members' wood processing plants all over the country. These plants produce lumber, veneer and plywood, posts, poles and pulp. The country has an annual requirement of around 2 to 2.5 million cubic meters of industrial logs for local production and export commitments.

He said this was seen to result in the dislocation of some two million workers employed by these plants.

The collapse of the wood processing industry, it added, would mean the loss of some P20 billion in investments in plants, machinery and equipment in wood based industries.

"Further, we will also lose our export market for wood products, particularly high value added goods, worth P21 billion yearly" the group said.

The country exports plywood and finished lumber to the United States, Australia, Japan, Korea and Europe.

Obviously, wood prices have gone up by 40 percent due to the tight supply of lumber and the high cost of import substitutes, adding pressure to the rising costs in the construction, furniture and wood housing sector. This ultimately hurts ordinary consumers who buy furniture, construction materials and other wood products," Marwan said.

Sun earmarks $200M to put up cell sites

By Clarissa S. Batino

SUN Cellular of Globe-spun owned Digital Mobile Philippines Inc. is embarking on a $200-million network expansion this year.

The move aims to increase the number of its cellular sites nationwide to about 3,000, which can accommodate six million subscribers.

"We are spending $200 million for network roll-out this year," said Julius Go, vice chair of parent firm Digital Telecommunications Phils. Inc.

Based on Digital's latest count, Sun Cellular now has about 1.5 million subscribers, up from 1.1 million in end-2004.

The company expects to break even on earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization when its subscriber base reaches 2.5 million.

Digital senior vice president William Panlaqui said Sun's subscriber base had been increasing by about 6,000 each day, mainly due to the 20/7 plan that allows unlimited calls and texts within the network for P200 a month or P300 for 1.6 days.

Before 24/7 was launched in October, Sun Cellular had only 700,000 customers.

Major carriers Smart Communications Inc. and Globe Telecom Inc. have asked the National Telecommunications Commission to stop Sun Cellular from continuing to offer 24/7.

The two firms claimed the Gokongwei phone company was engaging in predatory and discriminatory pricing that was approved without going through a public hearing.

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McDonald's embarks on aggressive expansion

By Doris C. Dumlao

MCDONALD'S Philippines plans to double its store expansion this year to take advantage of robust consumer spending.

Kenneth Yang, managing director of Golden Arches Development Corp. which operates the local McDonald's fast food chain, said the company was planning a more "aggressive" expansion this year.

"We are looking at opening about 20 new stores," Yang said, noting that only about 15 new stores were opened last year.

The stores to be opened will be a combination of those wholly owned by Golden Arches as well as franchised outlets. Investor profile will be put up in the partners.

Yang said McDonald's Philippines would soon open its first store in Zamboanga. He said the company was looking at putting up more stores in the Visayas and Mindanao, adding that there was still room for expansion in Metro Manila.

McDonald's has about 299 stores in the Philippines, said to be the only place in the world where the American fast food giant is not number one. It is expected to step up efforts to catch up with local leader Jollibee Foods Corp.

The American fast-food chain started in the country in 1981 when George Yang, president of McGeorge Food Industries, was awarded the franchise for the Philippines by McDonald's International.

Publicly listed holding firm Alliance Global Inc., the holding company, is taking a 60 percent stake in McDonald's Philippines which George Yang will retain direct ownership of the remaining 51 percent.

Yang said there would be no "franchise listing" of McDonald's Philippines as the local fast food chain is only seriously ready to do that business would be inland from AGI.

MCDONALD'S Philippines and Banco de Oro Universal Bank signed a deal that allows BDO to pick up automated teller machines (ATMs) in at least 20 McDonald's stores. BDO initially started in McDonald's Greenhills and Katipunan. The next targets: McDonald's Eastwood in Libis.

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COCKTALES

Victor C. Agustin

IT LOOKS like the Taiwan operations of his Metrobank are giving taipan George Ty some headache.

According to the Taipei Times, the island's Financial Supervisory Commission not only fined the Philippine bank NT$1 million [about P1.68 million], the authorities want the Metrobank Taipei branch manager, Sam Hsu, replaced, in connection with alleged irregularities.

The Taiwan authorities imposed the record fine after an audit showed that Metrobank Taichung branch's manager Jason Chen embezzled US$2.08 million in bank funds last year.

Chen had already been dismissed and has been banned from banking for five years, the newspaper reported last Friday.

In addition, the Financial Supervisory Commission wants Metrobank to pump in an additional NT$40 million (more than P70 million) capital into the Taiwan operations, to improve the branches' financial ratios.

Metrobank said that the fine had already been paid, and the additional NT$40 million capital already remitted by the Manila headquarters, increasing Metrobank Taiwan's net assets to more than NT$600 million.

Metrobank president Alfonso Ahasan said that the Taichung problem had already been "isolated," with charges having been filed way back in June 2004 against the former branch manager after a thorough investigation.

"Consequently, changes were effected at the management level to further strengthen operations," Ahasan said in a press statement.

To comply with the wishes of the Taiwanese authorities, a new branch manager from the Philippines will take over the Taipei operations beginning next month, Metrobank said.

Semirara chokes point

THE CHRISTIAN Semirara Mining Corp. has failed to persuade the Cebu Court of Appeals to lift a lower court injunction ordering the coal mine operator to vacate the overlapping grazing land being claimed by another party.

The adverse party, Henry T. Lim, has applied for a [illegible] open order with the Regional Trial Court in Culasi, Antique, so he could reclaim the 567 hectares of disputed grazing land that has been fenced off and kept away from him by Semirara.

Semirara, in turn, claims the Department of Environment and Natural Resources had already cancelled Lim's grazing concession for failure to pay the annual fees and submit grazing reports.

The disputed land covers about a tenth of Semirara's mining claim in the island, right next to Semirara's Panian mine. Semirara has built a road, several barge buildings and a conveyor belt on the site.

Incidentally, Lim's counsel is former Solicitor General Frank Chavez, whose use of unethical personnel control and DWDT police to break the Chongbell standoff in the early '90s has become a legal legend.

Money-go-round

• FIL-AM computer wizard Dindudo Ita makes last appearances included in Forbes magazine's annual "The Midas List," rising to number 42 from the previous year's 58, on the back of yet another success of his latest venture capital scheme.

• The hot high-end open space at the Fun adjoining the Manila Golf Club, currently awaiting away as parking space in front of the popular UCC Yabu Cafe, will finally be developed.

Lot owner Philippine Realty has agreed to a joint venture with ICTSI's Enrique Razon Jr., developer Alfred Ty and Bonifacio Land's Antonio Moncupa, with the latter group paying to exploit and

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US firm seen investing $2B in coal-to-gas facility in RP

By Abigail L. Ho

THE PHILIPPINES may be the next regional hub for coal-derived fuel as a United States-based firm, Headwaters Inc., prepares to invest $2.2 billion into a coal-conversion facility in the country.

The facility will have a capacity of 50,000 barrels a day.

The Department of Energy yesterday signed a memorandum of understanding with the company paving the way for the conduct of a feasibility study on the use of the country's indigenous coal for conversion into "oil on clean" gasoline or diesel.

Under the MOU, a pilot plant to be fed 25 kilograms of coal per day would be established. This will determine the suitability of local coal as feedstock coal into fuel technology.

If found feasible, a commercial arrangement between the DOE and Headwaters would be drafted. For commercial operations, a coal conversion plant capable of producing 50,000-70,000 barrels of fuel per day would be constructed.

The facility will be as big as the plant Headwaters is currently putting up in China, in partnership with the Shenhua Group, China's largest coal company.

Energy Undersecretary RODOLFO Agnacio Jr. Anthony Moira said the Philippine plant, if a commercial arrangement would be forged with Headwaters, should be operational by the first quarter of 2009.

The plant, with its ultra-clean gasoline and diesel, will not only help ease the country's dependence on imported fuel but also help slow down pump prices.

Abaya said if the fuel produced using Headwaters's coal conversion technology could be sold at around 10-20 percent lower than existing prices, the savings that could be generated from it would be tremendous.

Also, with the plant seen to replace at least 50,000 barrels of the 320,000 barrels of oil that the country uses daily, he said huge dollar savings would be realized.

Headwaters' entry will allow the full utilization of coal being produced in the country's mines, particularly in Semirara.

MNTC taking over NLEX operations

By Clarissa S. Batino

MANILA North Tollways Corp. is scheduled to take over the operations of the North Luzon Expressway on Feb. 18.

The schedule was set after the Tollway Regulatory Board approved yesterday the 166-percent toll adjustment sought by the Lopez-led consortium.

TRB executive director Manuel Imperial said MNTC must publish the new toll rates today. He said those who would object to the toll fee increase must give 90 days to file their objection before the tollway regulator.

MNTC president Jose "Ping" de Jesus said the consortium was ready to take over and was just waiting for the TRB's decision.

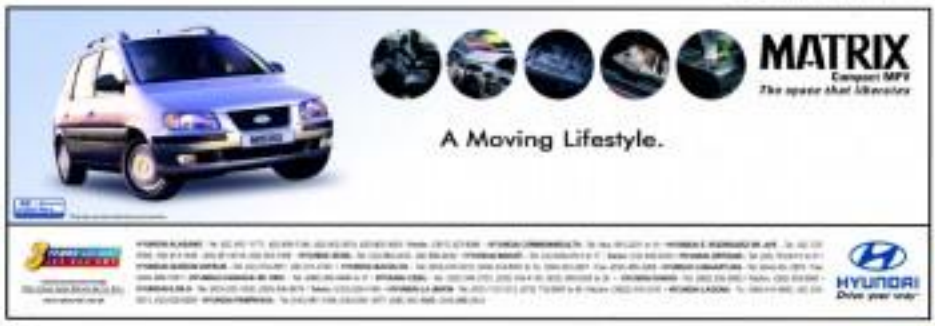
"Motorists can count on world-class road side service, emergency assistance, well-trained tollers and patrol cars, and an efficient traffic management system," said De Jesus in an interview.

MNTC will deploy 18 service patrol vehicles and seven motorcycles to assist motorists, he added. Discounts in public utility vehicles will be made available by Thursday.

MNTC's Tollway Management Corp. will operate the NLEX for 30 years.

The NLEX currently charge a fee of 52 centavos per kilometer for cars and jeeps of those classified as class 1 vehicles.

In June, the MNTC would charge a flat fee of P42 for cars and jeeps, P106 for buses and light trucks and P127 on heavy trucks and trailers totalling the 14-km stretch classified as open highway from Balintawak to Bocaue in Bulacan.



MOTOR

Sportivo

WIDER multireflector headlamps, 2-tone chrome-accented grille and a one-piece, black and body color front bumper distinguish the Sportivo from the Crossroad SUV line.

Isuzu Philippines Corp. is the car manufacturer that has gone the furthest to bridge the gap between Asian utility vehicles (AUVs) and sport utility vehicles (SUVs). Starting with the transformation of its 16-Lander from a boxy, prosaic AUV into the sleek, sensuously-contoured Crossroad four years ago, Isuzu has improved its AUV-cum-SUV almost every year.

The Crossroad XTO was launched in June 2001 as the Elite DIF (Diesel Automatic Turbo), its robust 3.5-liter powerplant being the first and only diesel direct injection turbocharged engine in its class mated to a 4-speed automatic transmission with overdrive. Moreover, the XTO, like a luxury car, had final access, big (cargo and keyless entry as standard equipment.

ON THE ROAD

Aida Sevilla-Mendoza

Bigger

Isuzu followed this up in February 2002 with the twin of the Crossroad SUV (Extreme Utility Vehicle) that was the biggest, tallest and widest vehicle in its class although during the same platform as the XTO. The EUV was the first 4LV to sport a rear-door mounted spare tire carrier with locking keyed lead cover. What's more, the EUV was dwarfed with the biggest (235/70R15) tires in its class and those were Michelin tires, at that. Because of its big feet, rear-door mounted spare tire, swing-out tailgate and extraordinary height equal to that of the Isuzu Trooper, the 4LV was an SUV dead ringer.

Barely five months later, in July 2002, Isuzu unveiled the 4LV—"innovative, instimmitable, incomparable"—Crossroad variant with an inside story the first in its class to be equipped with a videoke system-entertainment package that included a single in-dash CD player, two 5.4-inch headrest-mounted LCD monitors, two wireless mikes and remote control. Thus, a videoke bar is serving intercampus or other such is traffic or mooning driving trips.

In 2003, Isuzu relieved its new body colors for the Crossroad line and two-tone black and gray leather seats. Then minor changes could have signaled some substantial improvements to the pipeline and sure enough, last October, Isuzu launched its 2003 high-end Crossroad variant, the Sportivo.

Style in motion

Touted as "Style in Motion," the Sportivo has under-mentioned front bumper lamps; new instrument cluster combination lamps; a redesigned chrome accent radiator grille; subsplits two-piece black-and-body-color front bumper with integrated round fog lamps; new silver finish alloy mag wheels; anodized black aluminum roof rails; a newly designed Sportivo spare tire hard cover with cable lock; and, most noteworthy of all, chrome side-view mirrors with LED signal lamps.

Inside, sliding and reclining black leather bucket seats for driver and front passenger replace the standard fabric seats and the three-spoke steering wheel with audio controls is now wrapped in leather. The jump seats in the rear have been replaced with a front-facing third-row seats, access to which is facilitated by folding second-row seats; aluminum silver panels, window knobs and access room seats up the cockpit and a roomy front center console with lid, power outlets for a stereo CD, VCDs or DVDs. The headrest-mounted dual LCD monitors are still there, but instead of a videoke, a DVD system and AV input jack with power inverter and infrared headphone system can keep passengers entertained during long hauls.

Flex ride

Engineering-wise, the Sportivo's major improvement is its Flex Ride Suspension System which, Isuzu claims, helps the semi-elliptical steel leaf springs at the rear to absorb road shocks and provide a smooth, comfortable ride without sacrificing stability and safety. However, I wasn't able to check out the efficiency of Flex Ride since I never got to sit in the back during the week that the Sportivo was with me. I was always driving and experienced a comfy car-like ride because of its independent front double wishbone and torsion bar springs with stabilizer bar up front.

The Sportivo is unlikely to win any 0-to-100 km/hr acceleration contests, but then AUVs are meant to carry more people and cargo at lower cost than SUVs or minivans, not win races.

On the fuel economy, when you consider that the Sportivo is loaded with features usually not found in other AUVs and is sometimes only be found in higher-priced vehicles, and that it is powered by Isuzu's indomitable strong, reliable and fuel-efficient 2.5-liter DMV 4JA1-L direct injection turbocharged diesel engine delivering 95 ps @ 3,900 rpm max output and 18.9 kg m @ 2,000 rpm max torque, you can't complain too much for harboring SUV pretensions, to P1.065 million, the automatic transmission Sportivo may be pricier than the two other diesel AUVs in the market, but hey, it's a top of the line Isuzu.

TODAY'S BUMPER STICKER: Never lend your car to anyone to whom you've given birth. — from thembuck.

(E-mail comments to asevilla@inquirer.com.ph)

TUNNING silver accents, a 4-spoke black leather steering wheel, black leather bucket seats and a DVD/CD player in the Sportivo's cockpit

HEADREST MOUNTED LCD monitors are part of the Sportivo's DVD entertainment options.

INFLATE your tires properly for increased mileage.

Be 'car-care aware'

IT'S "Car Care Sale" season at Handyman Do It Best Home Center (Handyman) this 200.

Car care tips

With the benefits of proper car care, safety roads and economic savings as you "drive a bow!" with these proper driving habits and car care tips:

• Economize and clean. Aside from being the safer option, your car's fuel efficiency decreases significantly at speeds over 55 miles per hour. Similar cars driving minimizes the risk of hurt buildup and excessive, money-wear on tire treads. Driving smoothly saves on gas and lowers vehicle emissions. Accelerate slowly and gently and avoid sudden starts and stops, holes and rough roads.

• Beat rush hours. Drop redundant fuel efficiency, as driving with the windows open, using seat- or rear-mounted racks, and carrying heavy loads increase vehicle drag. If you sometimes need to transport large items, tie a cloth-cable mark on, if possible, carry the items in the trunk or inside the vehicle. Remove heavy items from the vehicle when you don't need them.

• Be ready! Have an emergency kit ready in your trunk: early warning device (EWD), car jack, spare wiper blades and fuses, bottled water, flashlight with spare batteries, basic tools such as screwdriver, pliers, adjustable wrench, an owner-proxy supply of motor oil, first aid kit, blow kit. Shoes and jumper. Handyman has wide array of car care gadgets at very reasonable prices; check them out while they're out!

• Tune still reborn not in use. This means no more lengthy idling. Don't start your car until you're ready to go and remember to keep engine warm-up brief. When stuck in heavy traffic or at your favorite fast food drive-in window? Better turn that engine off or lift the hand brake so you can release the accelerator and relax to avoid warming.

• No more tired tires. There is a recommended tire pressure for your car's efficient speeds and loads. Check your owner's manual or visit the manufacturers or local tire dealer. Tires that aren't properly inflated decrease gas mileage, leads to shorter tire life, and affects your car's alignment.

• Car commitments. Make under hood checks once a week or when refueling. Have an oil change every 3,000 miles. Keep oil filter fresh once a week. Hand washing is best, but if you must use a car wash, find one that is brushless and relies on high pressure water or streams that snap the car by hand. Wax for added protection.

• To ultimately save on gas, make fewer trips by consolidating errands and trips, or you may want to car pool. Drive before habits away today!

Save key dollars and save 10 percent on key duplication service. Visit Handyman's main section of Bonifacio Drive in Port Area, Balintawak Plaza in Fiesta, Quezon Avenue, Makati, Sucat, Alabang, Pasay, Pasig, Marikina, Cainta and Novaliches. Handyman has 10 Home Depot stores in Metro Manila, Visayas and Mindanao.

Toyota introduces all-new Hiace Commuter

TOYOTA Motor Philippines recently launched the all-new Hiace Commuter.

The new Hiace is packaged with an entirely new interior design featuring more space for functionality, a unique styling that gives an advanced powerful look, and a driving performance, which incorporates a direct injection four-stroke Common Rail Diesel Engine (D-4D).

It raises the standard in the utility van segment by providing customers with an evolution of functions, cargo, capacity, durability, reliability and economy.

Exterior, design

The new Hiace was not merely designed for functionality; it was also developed to make work and operation more enjoyable. Its exterior emphasizes an aerodynamic body to optimize performance. The Hiace engineers pursued an innovative exterior style suitable for a vehicle that is bound to last. The dynamic front view features voluminous sweeping curves and a big innovative bumper to emphasize the advanced styling, which goes beyond the traditional boxy commercial vehicle.

Toyota's new utility van incorporates a cab-forward configuration to allow for the largest possible passenger space. Upfront, the Hiace's nose line runs from the bulging center along both sides. Its windshield adopts green glass, while the front A-pillars are painted black for easy identification by oncoming traffic.

Unlike the usual vertical rear pillars, the Hiace's pillars slant rearward, while the quarter pillars are hidden by the window glass to create a smooth continuous design. Its sliding door units are now color-keyed and are integrated with the character lines, creating a fresh image. Full bodycoat also becomes a standard equipment to fully upgrade the consistent image to a higher-end vehicle.

Interior

The newly developed package of the Hiace offers living, with interior space with four rows of passenger seat with the width that allows a passenger load of 15 adults to sit in comfort with ample leg space.

Its height and width suit the configuration of the wide sliding doors that allow two passengers to get to and out at the same time. This is complemented by the side step for easy entry and exit of passengers, whether adult or child.

In addition, mechanical lock type sliding doors make downgrade loading or unloading much easier.

Toyota pursued comfort in the smallest details taking into consideration that the Hiace, which carries cargo, often spurs and worker that enhances the experience of their passengers. With the new Hiace, persons of comfort is high priority, as can be seen from the air conditioning in the generous of the interior.

The commuter models have air outlets in the roof above the passenger seats to reach seat enjoys a comfortable temperature. With commercial vehicle, given audio makes driving time more enjoyable for both drivers and passengers. The audio unit contains an AM/FM tuner, as well CD and MD player to promote relaxation during long hours of driving and transporting.

The new Hiace is powered by a 2KD-FTV 2.5-liter turbocharged diesel engine with advanced common rail fuel supply system that provides the torque that a commercial vehicle requires.

Durability, safety

Commercial vehicles are used for business, so they must be able to stand up under long hours of heavy use. The new Hiace has a rugged frame that is built of carrying full load of passengers or cargo.

The Toyota customer-aided engineering (CAE) technique was used to determine and analyze potential sources of noise and vibration, resulting to a torsional rigidity that is 40 percent higher than that of the current model. In addition to the rigid, rust-resistant body, the Hiace is structured in a way that limited ability and maintenance cycles, improving the cost-performance ratio means high-low.

Taking how commercial vehicles are used, the new Hiace offers excellent safety features to prevent accidents and protect occupants. It incorporates multi-reflector headlamps that throw a more effective light pattern. Nighttime driving feels safer due to the bright light pattern to either high or low beams.

Color lineup, pricing

The new Hiace is available in three shades: silver metallic, white and dark green mica metallic.

It is offered at P1,068,000 and is available for viewing for all interested customers at all authorized Toyota dealerships nationwide starting Feb. 7.

ALL NEW Hiace commuter

Shell to supply CNG to public transport buses

PILIPINAS Shell Petroleum Corp. president Edgar S. Chua and Energy Undersecretary Felix Sta Romana S. Chaya recently signed the supplemental agreement to the memorandum of agreement (MoA) that would finally make the compressed natural gas (CNG) available to public transport buses.

The project is meant to supply public transport buses with natural gas produced by the Malampaya Deep Water Gas-to-Power project under the government's natural gas vehicle program.

The supplement to the MoA seeks to finalize the negotiated CNG pricing for the benefit of public transport bus operators.

Signatories, witnesses

Energy Secretary Vincent Perez led the signing of the supplemental agreement together with Chua, Chaya and Pilipinas Shell SF for retail Samuel Dee Jeanmin.

Witnessing the ceremony were Pilipinas Shell GM for external affairs Roberto Ramos, Shell Philippines Exploration B.V. government relations manager Cris Acosta representing the Malampaya Consortium, PNOC Exploration Corp. president Rufino Buenaseda and Pilipinas Shell BoSAE regional sales manager for North Luzon Jojo Guiamalon together with owners and operators of public transport buses and officials and staff from the Department of Energy.

The signing ceremony was held at the DoE compound in Taguig City on Jan. 28.

RP bourse rates best in Asia

THE PHILIPPINE Stock Exchange emerged as the best performing bourse among its neighboring counterparts for January, with the PSEi Composite Index surging 32.8 percent or 1,96.73 points to 3,559.56 from 1,862.83 in December last year. The PSEi led in a statement.

Year-on-year, the index soared 33.9 percent from 2004's 1,508.35. Trading volume was significantly higher at 71.9 billion shares, or 877.2 percent higher than the 7.4 billion shares in the same period last year. Value turnover was 92.4 percent or P46,500.4 million compared with P24,180.8 million in January 2004.

Last year, the PSE made it as the second best performer among its neighbors, climbing 26.4 percent or 388.5 points at 1,862.83 from 1,474.37 in 2003, marked-to-finish said.

Trailing behind the PSE for the January market performance is the Stock Exchange of Thailand, which grew by 3.1 percent. The Jakarta Stock Exchange, the least performing neighboring exchange in 2004, landed on the third spot with a 4.5 percent growth rate.

For exchanges, on the other hand, posted declines the Shenzhen Stock Exchange and the Shanghai Stock Exchange, both in China; the Tokyo Stock Exchange; Taiwan Stock Exchange; and the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

"Starting the year with such high-note indeed places our stock market back in the portfolio of both domestic and foreign investors, consistent with our corporate vision to become a peer among the premier exchanges in the region in the next couple of years," said Francis Lim, PSE president and chief executive officer.

"Such bullish sentiment can be attributed to the string of good news that greeted us in recent months, the higher than expected GDP growth, the concrete measures undertaken by government to address the fiscal deficit, the strengthening of the peso, the impressive Grand Slam-like opening of the existing industry to foreign ownership and the array of positive news at the corporate front," Lim added.

The government was able to outperform its fiscal deficit goal for the second consecutive year at P146.1 billion, 19.1.7 billion below the FY04 P180 billion program and likewise set 2005 fiscal deficit target at about P180.6 billion. 7.10 percent lower than the previous P193.3 billion programmed level.

With the recent passage of the fiscal incentives or accountability reform bill into law, the steps to cut the expected economic turnaround for the country.

Overseas workers remittances rose 17.7 percent to $7.48 million in November 2004 from last year's level.

This development has been attributed to the growing number of Filipinos working abroad, sustained marketing campaign by commercials banks and financial institutions for the holidays season.

For the January to November period, cumulative remittances amounted to $77 billion, 11.6 percent higher than the $6.9 billion posted a year ago, exceeding government forecast of 6.0 percent 2004's annual growth, according to the PSE.

Benguet to raise $1.3B for mining

MINING company Benguet Corp., whose shares have doubled this year on hopes of a mining boom, yesterday said it was talking to Japanese and Chinese investors about raising $1.3 billion to fund nickel and copper projects.

Benguet said he a major beneficiary of a government drive to attract offshore investment to the Philippine mining industry—a drive that coincides with a growing Chinese appetite for raw materials.

Shares in the country's oldest mining firm have soared this year after an initial court ruling halted foreign investment, suspending an $8.7-percent rise for the Philippine market's main mining sector index.

A Japanese group that included Sumitomo Corp. and Sojitz Holdings Corp. had expressed keen interest in a nickel mining project in Zambales, according to Benguet.

"There are some negotiations being undertaken," Benguet officials said.

The firm said it needed at least $300 million to do detailed exploration and to develop to nickel deposits in Zambales.

Benguet, listed in 1982 and the pioneer of large-scale mining in the Philippines, said it would release other details of the project soon.

The Philippines, sitting on what the government estimates to $1 trillion in unexplored mineral wealth, wants local and foreign mining firms to pump about $6 billion into 20 priority projects over the next six years—investment that would spin off revenues and taxes to help plug a chronic government budget deficit.

Last week, the country rolled out the welcome mat to foreign investors at an international mining conference for nearly 300 delegates from Australia, Canada, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Germany, Taiwan and South Africa.

The three-day conference was held a day after the Philippine Supreme Court rejected an appeal by a tribal group opposed to a government decision to allow 100 percent foreign ownership of mines.

Reuters

S&P reviews San Miguel rating

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

INTERNATIONAL credit rating firm Standard & Poor's Ratings Services is reviewing the effect of San Miguel Corp.'s possible acquisition of Australian dairy firm National Foods Ltd. on the food and beverage giant's credit quality.

S&P said in its economic, however, that the foreign monetary rating on San Miguel's paper was "constrained by that on the Philippine Sovereign," which means that the firm's rating was pegged to that of Philippine debt rating.

San Miguel's foreign currency rating is pegged at BB- with a stable outlook.

San Miguel has been attracting investment interest due to its aggressive international expansion moves.

It recently made a takeover offer for all of the issued ordinary shares in National Foods at A$1.70 billion or A$5.95 billion, banning the earlier offer by New Zealand's Fonterra Co-operative Group Ltd. at A$1.45 billion.

The proposed acquisition is in line with San Miguel's ambition to expand its presence in the Asia-Pacific market for non-alcoholic beverages and food.

The acquisition will be funded mainly through new bank debt, and San Miguel has received bank offers worth as much as $1.85 billion.

A PSEi clocks its road banks stocks of San Miguel beer taxes in Manila. San Miguel Corp., the country's largest food and beverage conglomerate, on Monday said it has set a Feb. 18 record date for its stock rights offering that it announced last December. SMC said its board authorized the issuance of additional shares equivalent to 16 percent of its outstanding capital stock.

Sources said five banks have so far agreed to lend to San Miguel, namely ABN Amro Holding NV, Barclays Plc, HSBC Holdings Plc., Standard Chartered Plc and Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corp.

San Miguel is also preparing to raise capital from a stock rights offering, which is open to stockholders of record as of Feb. 16.

2-year treasury bond rate falls to 8.87%

By Michelle V. Reyes

THE RATE for the two-year Treasury bond fell by over 200 basis points to 8.87% percent yesterday as high market liquidity and strong fundamentals made the 2-year bonded appetite for the long term government securities.

The new rate of 8.875 percent was 212.5 basis points lower than the 11 percent recorded in December. It was also 200 basis points below the two-year debt paper's coupon in October 2003 when the rate reached 8.75 percent.

"I have never seen anything like this... rates moving this fast," said one bond trader. "It's more sentiment driven than anything else."

Banks scrambled for the two-year Treasury and placed as much as P17.65 billion worth of bids, or more than double the government's intended borrowing of only P8 billion.

On the other hand, bid rates for the two-year bonds were also lower than the 11 percent coupon rate.

The Treasury's auction summary showed P8 billion worth of bids, raising in full its borrowing program for the week.

Traders said the steep decline of the rate was attributed to the slew of good news, such as the forecast of Internal Revenue's report that it surpassed its collection target for January, the strengthening of the peso, and the improved outlay of budget proponents in the morning session.

The BIR earlier reported that it topped its collection target of P40.9 billion for January. It's February figure was pegged at P41 billion.

According to National Treasurer Rosita Lasala, the string of positive news came at a time when banks are very liquid, therefore putting more downward pressure on the interest rate. She said also of banks actively expand their loan portfolios and position their investments as high-yielders.

Although interest rate was at a decade low, Lasala said the Bureau of Treasury would keep away temptations to borrow more than what was programmed. For the first quarter, the Treasury was set to borrow P91 billion through the auctioning of Treasury bills and bonds.

Peso back . . .

years, calling for caution over monetary discussion spending. The loan budget proposed received positive feedback across global markets.

The US dollar also was boosted by comments from US Federal Reserve Chair Alan Greenspan on Friday suggesting that the United States would not let the dollar settle its huge trade deficit. Some traders interpreted Greenspan's comments ahead of the week-

end's Group of Seven meeting as a sign that the dollar may not intervene more to depreciate to address the US' trade deficit.

The greenback has been on a downtrend since late 2004 on concerns about the widening US trade and budget deficits.

In the other hand, bid rates for the two-year bonds were also lower than the 11 percent coupon rate.

BIR sets lifestyle . . .

four times be measured with his doctor (as reflected by four examinations) next June 30th, 2005. But based on BIR data, that doctor only paid P500 worth of value-added tax, and 10,204 worth of income tax.

Guillermo said the BIR would use predictive modeling to zero-

pursing the tax liabilities of doctors. Predictive modeling is the result of examining one's tax data using available data, such as an individual's networth.

After conducting a lifestyle check on doctors, she said, the BIR would then zero in on lawyers and accountants.

Cocktales

Turn to page B3

websites) marketing expertise for the planned twin condos.

► THE CHIEF historians counsel of Fredelin Montemar, Aztec Line, is back in Manila, not only to consult with his famous client but this time to also check out the state of local stats on all research in the new Medical Cityin Bengas.

Heard through the grapevine

FORMER Finance Secretary Jose Isidro Camacho has accepted a regional vice chair position from the investment bank Credit Suisse First Boston, with Singapore as his base, where he hopes to rebuild his and his family's nest egg.

Camacho, according to President Arroyo, formerly has PE and lost a munch job at Deutsche Bank after failing to join the $300 Cabinet for PGMOCo meeting.

(Email: cocktales_pdi@philstar.net or cocktales_pdi@yahoo.com)

DISCLOSURES

BENGUET Corp. announced its annual stockholders' meeting from March 16 to April 27 at 2 p.m. at the Sign of the Angel, 5/F Equitable PCI Bank Tower 1, Makati Ave. corner H.V. dela Costa St., Makati City.

* * *

MEGAWORLD Corp. confirmed that it will undertake a P1 billion mixed-use project near the Mimay Japanese International Airport Terminal 2.

* * *

PHILWEB Foods Corp. disclosed that for the period, Jan. 19 Feb. 4, 2,000 of 800,000 shares were exercised and fully paid under its stock option plan.

* * *

SAN MIGUEL Corp. principal officer Danilo Navarro sold 3,000 A shares and 1,703 B shares on Feb. 4.

* * *

STARMI Place Hotel Corp. will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on April 19. Record date is March 30. (compiled by BJ Pia, PDI Research)

LIFESTYLE

CORNMEAL Crusted Oysters with Thai Chili Cilantro sauce, drizzled with harissa, aioli and lemon wasabi puree. Complimentary for couples on Valentine's Day!

HOT your ordinary bar Calamares

ANGUS Beef, a Katre bestseller! Juicy and delectable to the last bite.

GRILLED Mahi Mahi with Hicaros of Cabra Scallops served with mild Wasabi dash, rice and vegetables

Hot fusion

One look at Katre's Mediterranean-inspired menu and you'd feel right at ease

Text and photos by Zoe Castro
Correspondent

KATRE started out as a hole in the wall situated across a girly bar in Scout Rallos, QC. Chef and owner Rina Gaiko would overhear customers saying the food was beyond great, but complaining about dressing up for dinner and finding themselves in a Chinese-style dining setting.

Later, Katre relocated to a better spot a few streets down to Dr. Lazcano. Now, people don't complain anymore.

From the outside, the restaurant seems intimidating and pricey, but one visit to Katre can break that misconception. The white table cloth, elegant seats and ambient lighting don't intimidate, they welcome.

For one to descend to the scene of an intimate casual clubbin, and still blend into Katre's cozy atmosphere. It's definitely a great date place for Valentine's Day.

Katre has a varied clientele, from students and couples to yuppies, families, college friends having reunions, even politicians and their security people. Being near UHS and ADB-CBD stations, bigwigs and celebrities are also frequent diners.

At ease

One look at Katre's menu and you'd feel right at ease. Gaiko chose to keep things simple for his Mediterranean Fusion cuisine. The menu holds no fancy unpronounceable names, just detailed descriptions of the dishes and their ingredients.

Katre dishes are also relatively inexpensive, compared to other similarly themed restaurants. Main courses and pasta dishes average P200. Bestsellers include the ex. Sizzling Paella: Tea Outcomboo for P260, Cream of Wild Mushroom soup, Field Green Salad with Grapes, Roast Chicken with Pesto, and Grilled Mahi-Mahi.

Fortunately, these dishes are included in its Welcome Weekend Special Menu, which consists of the following:

Choice of main course

Chicken—Roast chicken with olive oil, garlic, lemon and basil, served with pasta with mushrooms essence and basil (P575)

Fish—Grilled Mahi Mahi with Hicaros of Cabra (P560)

Scallops served with mild Wasabi dash, rice

FIELD Green Salad with Grapes

GEOFF Rodrigues

MONICA Enriquez

FADMAN Mangubat

COOKIE Lee

MARC Lorica

Fearless Pinoys

Ten daring individuals will compete in the Philippines' first extreme stunt TV show called Enervon AXN Xtreme

By JP Vicente
PEP Correspondent

HOW far would you go to experience extreme excitement? Would you traverse a one-inch steel beam suspended three stories high? Would you ride a motorcycle on a bull's number? Would you dare go underwater with ferocious crocodiles?

Ten daring individuals who have the guts for these adventures will compete in the Philippines' first extreme stunt television production AXN. The show, called Enervon AXN Xtreme, will be broadcast soon in more than 30 Asian countries.

After six hours of grueling tryouts and rough interviews during the qualifying rounds last December at the Rizal Coliseum, five guys and five gals were chosen to compete.

The Pinoy male species is represented by young politician Blue Lyonne, commercial model Geoff Rodrigues, Mechanical Engineering student Greg Ibe Jr., former waiter Allen Felson Monga Jr. and "outdoor fan life" Jimmy Hendra.

Challenging the guys are Chinese educator Julie Chiongson, party animal Monick Enriquez, single mother Cookie Lee, stuntwoman Anna Lorenne Olandes and Filipino-American beauty queen Michelle Hanson.

Subic was the perfect setting for the extreme challenges presented in the show. Starting Feb. 24, each of finalists is thrice hair-raising episodes that will see them carry out one thrilling feat after another in their quest for Asia-wide fame, fortune and glory.

Join in the fun and vote for your favorite contestant on AXN's website when its online poll kicks off on February 21. The grueling Enervon AXN Xtreme season, on air ground events has been laid out for mid-February giving the public a chance to share in the extreme action.

E-mail the author at jp_vicente@yahoo.com

JIMMY Hendra

GENE Ibe Jr.

ALLEN Lorenne Olandes

MICHELLE Hanson

JOLLY Chiongson

Hot fusion

and vegetables.

Surf and Turf—Cornmeal crusted Surfin Cod with Thai Cilantro Pesto served with squid ink Risotto (P735) and Grilled Tenderloin with Shitake Beef (P760).

Grilled Angus Rib Eye steak An Jus, served with Roast Radish, Mashed Potatoes with Pesto.

Price of main course includes complimentary hors d'oeuvres per couple (Cornmeal Crusted Oysters with Thai Chili Cilantro sauce), Soup Sampler (Garlic bisque, Cream of Mushroom soup with Tortilla Crisp, Tomato Brunoise, Cream Fresh and Parmesan), Salad Sampler (Field Green Salad with Balsamic Vinaigrette, served with grapes, tapenade, fennel and asparagus).

For dessert, you can choose either Chocolate Fudge Cake, Crème Brulée or Carrot cake.

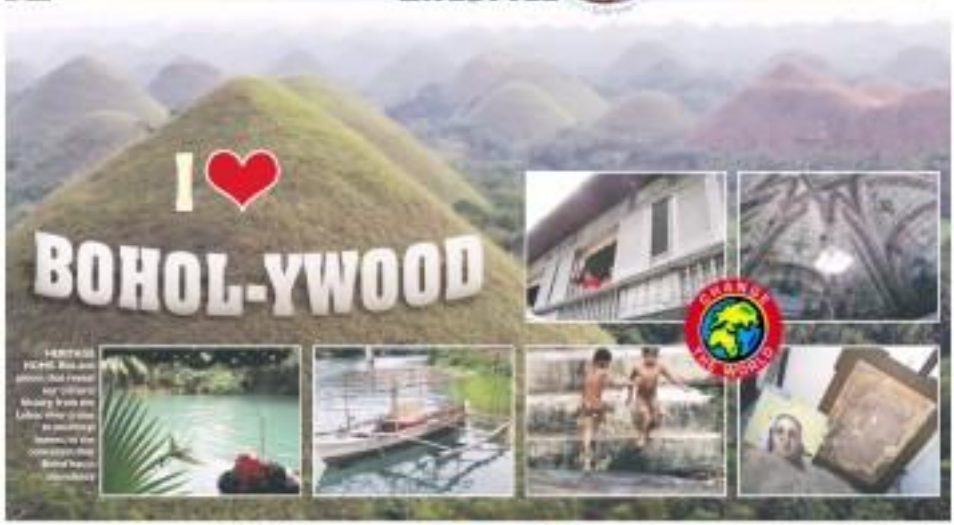
For Valentine's Day, there are three seating schedules: 6.7:30 p.m., 7:30-9 p.m., and 9-10:30 p.m. It's best to book before the big day.

Enervon is located at 103 Dr. Lascano St., QC. Open daily except Mondays for lunch and dinner (11-2 p.m. and 6-10 p.m.). Call 3734705 and 3746668.

Enervon will be giving away a gift certificate to celebrity couple

ADOBO Chicken with olive oil, garlic, lemon and basil, served with pasta with mushroom, essence and basil

I ♥ BOHOL-YWOOD



HERITAGE HOMES. Bea and patrons find revival and cultural bloom there. Lolong, who praises as paintings in heaven, is the cone-pepper shop. Behind her is a stonebuilding.

Photos by Tim Yap

THE HILLS ARE ALIVE. Pastrik Reyes loves the Chocolate Hills.

CHOCOLATE. Dj Monsters makes chipping.

MY favorite Bohol buddy, aside from Gumil and Marianito

GABOK THE GUARDIAN. Bea and cultural pillar Sarah Lobod of the Loboc Children's Choir has curator of the Tubonan exhibit.

TOY STORY. You are what you collect.

TILES from the ceramics floor

JAMMING WITH FATHER JOSEPH. Fr. Joseph with Bea E.

I HONESTLY had second thoughts about going to Bohol for the simple reason that I am not the kind who enjoys Concert as the Park or Susan Calo-Medina's travelogue type of shows.

In short, I am not a history-culture culture [Discourse Bea's pop culture-valiant]. I always believe that I can do more by focusing on the now and saving my nights on the future.

But with the Metropolitan Museum's Lisa Macuja and art patroness and Julia Roberts look-alike Bea Zobel, dr. as captains of our ship, how could I go wrong? I met this French couple who was planning to leave the Philippines out of sheer boredom, but after they joined one of the "fun and fun" local conversations, they changed their minds and decided to stay in our land of guns and guns.

This particular journey took me to a PAL flight to Tagbilaran ("Tight value?" I asked myself). I couldn't find the counter to check in, me knowing that Bohol is in Tagbilaran, much like Boracay is in Kalibo or Catclan. Our flight was at 8 a.m., I arrived at the airport at 7:20 a.m., but as it turned out, our flight was delayed. As I was checking in, I realized someone up there really wanted me to get to Bohol, maybe to learn something or meet someone. I just left it all to fate and went straight to my plane heading towards Tagbilaran.

Heritage homes

Upon arrival, we were met by two of Bea Zobel's cultural vanguards, two jolly men who continue to weave the heritage flag for Boholanos—Gumil Lobod of the Loboc Children's Choir and Bartolomeo Lumpas, the curator of Holy Name University Museum. Hearing them talk about their history, I sensed a deep sense of pride, and it's clear that what they had painstakingly worked hard for might go for naught.

Our group proceeded to the Ajuy-ay house in Tarsiers, one of nine heritage homes documented in its turn down by the Department of Public Works and Highways to give way to roads.

We were then to attend a meeting with the residents as they welcomed us with open arms, showed us around their home and led us a merienda of local delicacies. Until now, I salivate with the thought of tuerero dipped in adobo, a Boholano favorite. I took snapshots of what I thought made the house uniquely Pinoy, aside from the architecture and vintage fabric: dishcloths and napkins displayed on the living room, ornate wedding souvenirs and a collection of 101 Dalmatian toys.

For lunch, we went aboard a floating restaurant—the Loboc love boat took us on a river cruise around the lovely Loboc river. The mood was dreamy. The hosts was adorned with coconut leaves and rapa fruit and local flowers. The

FILIPINO GRUDGE. Joel Llabres, attorney, owes Richard Bera

X FACTOR. Karen Tanada as Carmen Rama-Rivera

TUBURAN HERITAGE. The bishop of Bohol with Marianito Lumpas of Holy Name Museum

Tim Yap

SOUTH STAR. Sunny Lobo of Cebu posed with the lechon.

ON THE BUS TO BOHOL. Our mini-tour Hero-politan Pharmacy guide, Jun Manalo

BOHOL'S RESIDENT DJs. Photo providers during the Loboc River cruise

GA COCONUT NUT. "It's the coco fruit from the coco tree..."

KODAKAN. Part of Ivy Pinon gathering

PRETTY WOMAN. Bea Zobel, jr. proves that preserving a country's heritage has its rewards.

CULTURE MOVERS. Pilo Aquino and Joseph Gonzales

FAMILY TREE. This painting was inked on into the Mijon Ajuy-ay house.

MUSICAL PLAYGROUND. LOBOC Children's Choir costumes on display

KODAKAN. Part of Ivy Pinon gathering

wears, a hazy shade of eyelashes, massaged out weary eyes and the soul leaves kissed our cheeks.

Chocolate Hills happy

For background music, we had a medley of everything from "Dahil Sa Iyo" and "Manalo-la" to "Tinatawanan." So audience favorite, from Tagalog to Cebuano to English to Spanish to French, completed the afternoon fiesta.

From there, the "kids" in the group decided to stay over in the Chocolate Hills. Lead by the lady behind Inn's success, his mom Cecilia, an happy troupers gamely marched and climbed 216 steps to get to the top where the best views of the famed humps from Bohol.

"I want to buy one of those hills," one wanderer, Patrick Reyes of the Manila Jockey Club, said. "Let's all buy one each so we can all be neighbors!" I seriously gave this suggestion much thought.

Dinner was held at the Oasis convento, in a beautiful oasis with a domed ceiling painted in the 1930's by Bea Fenaris. Multi-colored flowers adorned the tables, making one the solace comment, "It looks like it's for Our Lady of Peñafrancia."

A concert by the Loboc Children's Choir preceded our heavenly dinner. (I would take another article to describe how yummy the food was), which was superbly catered by Nicky Wellington of the Bee Inn.

"You guys are better than the Vienna Boy's Choir, you're better than the Chanson Choir [if there's one], you're better than everyone!" embraced trio Bea Zobel, after being enormously moved by their performance. The other parents were in tears, too. Their emotions inducing the finale and performances took me on a roller-coaster gamebump ride. If you've heard these kids' voices and seen their happy, innocent faces, you'd know what I mean.

Loboc Heritage Center

The next day saw the launch of the Tubonan program. It was a joint project of the Diocese of Tagbilaran, Loboc Socio-Cultural Cooperative, and the Bee Museum. The project aimed to save the cuisine of Loboc into a heritage center.

The Rhea Restaurant, a 1960s revamp team, signalled the opening of the heritage exhibit by the youth of Loboc—the performers of a Bee heritage workshop for the youth. The "Rave of Song" and "Kapamilyahinan" (say it again and again) exhibit showcased the musical heritage of Loboc.

After that was the official launch of the Tubonan Interning-spiegl project, which gave interest the elders and youth of the group. Gardi presented the 10-year plan for Loboc's arts and culture. "I hope we're still alive by that time," he quipped.

The governor then declared Loboc as the arts and culture center of Bohol, which was greeted by wild applause by the young people of Bohol. The morning meals were interspersed with theatrical numbers from the traditional music of Loboc, which included the rhythmic band, and snack breakers or customs.

We then had a spectacular lunch of local food, including an incredible coconut soup and crabs. But what I could not forget was the rice, which Bohol is actually famous for.

To fight for

BAE happened at the Dauphin Island Nature Resort, which I want to visit again for its beauty alone.

Looking back, what I thought would be a boring field trip turned out to be a goose-bumps experience on our heritage.

It isn't enough that we focus on the present and future. A good understanding and appreciation of the past proves that we can go a long way in defining the present and planning for the future.

To quote Bea Zobel, it is her many-aged speech to the people of Bohol, "You always say 'thank you' to us for visiting your green province, but we are the ones who should thank you, for sharing with us your culture, because it is what defines our being Filipino. And this is what we should fight for."

2BU! EXCLUSIVE

Stephen Hillenburg's undersea playground

The creator of SpongeBob SquarePants talks about his hit creation

PATRICK Star, Stephen Hillenburg, SpongeBob SquarePants and Squidward Tentacles

By Maui V. Rigos
2BU! Correspondent

FORTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD Stephen Hillenburg has achieved many great things. For starters, he's taught kids Marine Biology has a career's degree in experimental animation at the California Institute of Arts, and he conceived the lovable wallaby Rocko in 1993 for "Rocko's Modern Life."

That, and he finally answered the age-old question: Who lives in a pineapple under the sea?

2BU! got on the phone with one of the hottest cartoon animators today (as his fan Christian gangs in Cbe Bistro have been complaining that the characters on SpongeBob SquarePants are promoting homosexuality!). And just in time for the release of the SpongeBob SquarePants movie!

When did you first realize you wanted to become?

I was inspired when I was 11 years old. I went to this film festival, and they showed films from all over the world, and it was an experience that just left me with fond memories. It was such a big inspiration to me. I wasn't influenced by television as a kid. I was influenced by films.

You minored in Marine Biology in college. Where did your fascination with marine life start?

Well when I was in kindergarten I loved drawing the sea, and the ocean... and lessons, in general. One of the things I loved to do was look at the beaches in Southern California. And in the 60's there were these spectacles on TV about sharks, and at that time it was really a huge thing because not a lot of people did those before. Then in high school I started scuba diving, and then I taught kids marine science, and I was also painting on the side. The painting part was something very personal. I never thought I could turn it into a career, and then I saw another filmfest that was all about animation, and that made me want to go back to school again.

And where did the idea of SpongeBob come from?

I wanted a Jerry Lewis-type of character who lived underwater. I like to surf, so I wanted a show that combined surf culture and marine biology. And I thought of the oddest sea creature there is... a sponge. It's funny, it's silly, it's strange, it's square peg in a bunch.

Did you ever imagine that as a cartoon, it would appeal as much to adults as well? Dr. Dre and Bruce Willis are fans!

It's a kid's show obviously, but we make it funny for us, like those animated short films I used to watch. Like Bob and Weave! It's all about characters in certain a slapstick way, among other things. Actually, it's very easy for kids to understand.

You've said that you don't want to have a lot of celebrities do cameos, because that would be too much like The Simpsons...

Well there are our writers to have a vast number of cameos. That's all been explored by the Simpsons, and SpongeBob is an entirely isolated world, while the Simpsons are this parallel universe to ours. Any cameo from somebody from our world would be weird. We did it for the movie because he ventures into our world. We try to keep the series simple, to make it all about the cast.

Who are your favorite characters?

I think Squidward is funny. But then there's Patrick. He can steal the show sometimes. He's the redneck, so he has a lot of funny moments.

Will you be adding more characters to the show?

We just want to keep the show simple and not try to have too many characters. It's about SpongeBob, and if we need other characters, we'll add them. But then that would mean a new design, new animation, and new problems. So we'd like to keep it simple.

So you model characters after people you know in real life?

A lot of people, like Doc Wes I mean...

But each character is a combination of people I know or heard about. Like, people in your life who's always grouchy. Or like, everyone knows a guy who's like Patrick. We say all kinds of someone, right? It's basic human behavior, really.

And what was it like working with David Hasselhoff?

He was great to work with. He had to do it once and he had to make fun of himself. And he had to wear three red shorts in the middle of the lake in winter.

What's in store for SpongeBob?

We're doing 28 new episodes.

Will SpongeBob get a girlfriend?

No, no girlfriend. He's this innocent character, and a girlfriend might make him too grown-up.

A SQUARE peg in a bunch

PATRICK the scene-stealer

ASSUMPTION College representatives to the Philippine Association of National Advertisers (PANA) Marketing Communications Competition: Ms. Rosario L. Vivero, Abigail M. Dalisa, Katherine M. Chiu, Jaqueline B. Bilbao and Kyla Arbelle G. Ortigas, with professor Neal Tiong (extreme left)

Turning young women into achievers

ASSUMPTION College is especially pursuing an over the vision of its founder, Blessed Marie Eugenie Milleret de Brou on creating good.

And on Feb. 22, the school in San Lorenzo, Makati is inviting everyone to visit. It will open its doors until noon to colleges applicants who may want to see first hand how classes are conducted and what day to day activities are like.

The school was established to shape young women into active, socially-aware, passionately committed achievers who would be future leaders in their respective fields.

Alumnae of the school located are striving to make a difference in various fields and contributing whatever they can to make the world a better place. They are known as, "Women of Faith, Strong in Service."

Assumption College believes it is in a unique position to become a leader and innovator in transformative education. It is constantly trying to nurture its faculty through its charism of education for moral transformation, strength and experience as a pioneer in the country in teacher training based on a transformative pedagogy, and each exposed for maximizing the potentials of its graduates.

Who's who

In terms of alumnae shows how successful the school is in pursuing its vision. It includes President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo; Assumption Alumnae Association president Judy Araneta-Roxas of the Araneta Group of Companies; award-winning film director Marilou Diaz-Abaya; entrepreneur Margarita Forés; Philippine Anti-Graft commissioner Yvette Rabaya; Eleanor Roosevelt award winner Marivic Primicias Cruz; clinical psychologist Dr. Teresa Villasor; ABS-CBN Bantay Bata Foundation Inc. chief Gina Lopez; SM Inc. president and Banco de Oro Universal Bank chair Teresita Sy-Coson; Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) president C.E. Tan-Torres and her sister, Chanda S. Nalluga, a partner in the accounting firm Joaquin Cunanan, Price Waterhouse; Chan Sullivan, enterprise director at Maria Eugenia Institute; Adelina Ibarrola Bonilla, wife and mother; and a whole line of Filipina women starting with PDI's chair, Maria Ressa Prieto.

Young achievers

A younger generation of Assumptionista are also living up to the college's tradition of excellence and service.

For instance, Jennifer Teves, 22, was recently named one of the Ten Outstanding Students of the Philippines and a Benigno Aquino awardee for Nationalism.

She graduated in 2004 BS in Psychology summa cum laude and valedictorian of the Mother Maria Eugenia award, the highest honor given by the college.

Media Production graduate Ina Bonifacio project as a senior, an 18-minute documentary, "Bagets Ngayon: Ang Kwento ng Pagsisiyam" for "Mayroong Paghihirap"), was named "Best Student TV Production" in the 2004 Catholic Mass Media Award. It is a poignant depiction of the Aetas' struggle to attain equality and integrity in modern society.

Assumptionists have also made their mark in international competitions like the Interior Design competition in Japan. The college's students found it from their interaction with people of different nationalities like Koreans. The curriculum enables foreign students to integrate easily with their Filipino counterparts.